FORTUNE'S BOATS

By

BARBARA YECHTON

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Barbara Yechton

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FORTUNE'S BOATS

BY

BARBARA YECHTON

Author of "We Ten, or The Story of the Roses;" "A Lovable Crank, or More Leaves from the Roses;" "A Little Turning Aside;" "A Young Savage," etc.

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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TO

MY BELOVED

BROTHER AND SISTER

JOHN AND FANNY KRAUSÉ MORRISON

1712022

"Fortune brings in some boats that are not steered."

"Chance — that chance the Eternal God did guide."

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FORTUNE'S BOATS

CHAPTER I

URSULA'S STORY

URSULA JEFFREY ran gayly up the long flight of stairs that led to the apartment where she lived, at the top of the house. "Mother! Girls! Open the door! I have some news!" she called, her fresh young voice ringing out ahead of her.

"Sh! my dear!" some one said in mild reproof; and when Ursula, flushed and breathless, reached her own front door, she saw two men sitting at the farther end of the hall, in the afternoon sunshine which streamed through the small glass skylight and made the "top floor" the most desirable apartment in the house, despite the many steps that had to be traversed to reach it.

One of the men smiled at Ursula: he was her uncle Gabriel. His companion was a large heavy man, shabbily dressed, and sitting awkwardly on the edge of the chair which the Reverend Gabriel Kincaid had brought out into the public hall for his accommodation. He shot a sly hasty glance at the bright-faced girl from under a pair of sullen beetling brows.

Uncle Gabriel waved his fingers airily at his niece. "Don't ring; the latch is up. Go right in," he told her, with a beaming smile. "Your mother 's in there, and Margaret."

"Oh ho! then Margaret has come. Jolly!" exclaimed Ursula, and opening the door she stepped into the narrow dark passageway which, though only about fifteen feet long, was yet proudly designated in the advertisements as a "private hall." Speeding through the short entry, guided by the sound of singing, Ursula paused at the open dining-room door and looked in. "Oh, here you all are!" she said in a tone of satisfaction.

The room was of a good size, running the width of the house, and light, having two large windows. Across the western window stood an old roomy flat-topped desk, laden with books, papers, manuscripts, and writing material. In the south window sat Mrs. Jeffrey, a plump little woman with a cheery placid face; she was darning a much-worn tablecloth. The four girls scattered about the room were her daughters, of whom Margaret, aged twenty-three, was the eldest, and eighteen-year-old Frances the youngest. Between these two came Ursula and the twins, Judith and Ruth.

On a low bench beside her mother sat handsome, hazel-eyed Margaret, her dark head bent over the tablecloth, her shapely hands busy darning. The table was divested of its cover, and, with a paper pattern spread before her, Ruth was carefully cutting out a skirt. Judith lay at full length on the shabby comfortable old lounge; and

though there was a strong buzz of conversation going on, over by the window stood Frances, holding a dilapidated piece of music at arm's length before her, and singing scales at the top of her vigorous young voice.

Conversation and scales alike came to an abrupt close at Ursula's appearance.

"Well! if you are n't screeching!" she hastened to inform Frances, with sisterly candor. "I thought you always practiced in the sitting-room."

"I was trying to get up to high C," answered the young person she addressed, not at all abashed. "And I was n't going to be banished away off to the sitting-room — shut up there alone — when everybody else was here."

"She was afraid she 'd lose something, now that Margaret has come," remarked Judith lazily. "You know that, as a family, we delight in seeing, hearing, and enjoying everything — *all* together!" She made a languid, graceful sweep of her arms as if drawing the whole family to her in one embrace. To be graceful was as natural to Judith as to breathe; as natural as the good "style" with which she wore her clothes, and the fine poise of her dark head. Though always making the most of her inches, Judith was considerably below her twin in height, and the contrast between them was still farther marked by Ruth's finely moulded figure, her masses of light hair touched with yellow, and the innocent dark gray eyes that expressed far more than their owner ever imagined or felt. With this fine physique was united a sim-

plicity of thought and speech, a deliberation and literalness very unlike Judith's clear mind, her quick wit and sarcasm, her whimsical changeableness, and the dignity on which she prided herself. In the way of looks Ursula had long ago graded the girls thus: "Margaret is the beauty of the family — always was, always will be — bless her! Next comes Rufie" (the home name for Ruth) — "not far behind, but never knowing it. Taken on your own merits, Judy — separately — you *might* by a partial judge be declared pretty, but with your two sisters by, for comparison, you may consider yourself well treated if called good-looking. Still, some compensations have been given you — don't ask me what they are; you know well enough. As for you, Frances, and myself, we have no description; we are simply possessed of certain items apiece — two eyes, a nose (alas!), a mouth (again alas!). But as these faces are all we 'll ever have, we must e'en accept our lot and try to be cheerful over it."

But family opinion is not always infallible. Ursula's broad smooth forehead and delicately marked eyebrows, her steady honest gaze and kindly mouth, made her often very pleasant to look at; while the brown eyes, brilliant as Margaret's, that lighted up Frances's piquant little brunette face, and her heavy mane of wavy chestnut-colored hair, were "items" by no means to be despised. The sun was glinting into bright red the stray short locks that stuck out so liberally around Francie's head, as she stood in the west window

this afternoon, holding her shabby music and looking up at Ursula with a saucy smile. "Well, if you must know, I *did* want to hear Margaret tell about those Austins," she admitted, "and that funny pompous butler, and" — But no one was paying the slightest attention to her; so, leaving the sentence unfinished, Frances tossed aside her music, and openly joined the group at the other end of the room.

At the mention of Margaret's name Ursula had rushed forward and embraced the big girl who was sitting at her mother's feet. "You love of a Marnie!" she exclaimed rapturously. "This is the jolliest surprise! Going to stay to tea with us, aren't you? That's beautiful! Miss Austin is an angel to have let you come. And you're just in time to hear my news."

Mrs. Jeffrey let the tablecloth fall into her lap, and looked expectantly at the eager flushed face of her second daughter, while the girls immediately flocked close around Ursula, crying, "News! news! Tell us at once, at once!"

"I certainly will, if you people 'll only give me space to breathe," protested Ursula, putting out her arms to ward them off.

"Did n't I tell you — *close* together!" murmured Judith pensively, regardless of the fact that she had been one of the foremost in the little crowd. "Ursa, I've an idea!" she went on, giving her sister a sharp little pat on the shoulder to secure attention, then standing off, head on one side, to continue her remarks. "When you finish your

novel that 's to bring you (and us, of course) fame and fortune, and you start the carriage and pair which would then be a necessity — if we were rich we certainly could n't do anything so vulgar as walk! — would n't it be a fine idea to have the vehicle circular in shape? Then we could put mother in the middle, and we five sit round her, when we took an airing; we 'd all be so close together and 'comfy' and satisfied. Don't you see? Mother 'd be the centre of attraction — the great planet — and we girls her satellites; nobody would be slighted or left out in the cold, as Jim would say, and peace and happiness would be supreme in the Jeffrey family. Now tell us your news, do!" finished Judith abruptly, impatiently.

"It 's about your work — and it 's good news," remarked Ruth in soft drawling accents, eyeing Ursula speculatively.

"*I* know what 't is!" suddenly declared Frances, flourishing her long arms excitedly. "That big black ogre of an editor in chief that you told us about, Ursa, has in some mysterious way discovered you 're writing a novel that 's going to be famous — set the world on fire! — and he has gone down on his stiff old knees and fairly *implored* you to let him have it as a serial (is n't that what you call it?) for the paper, for the noble sum of" —

"You 've just hit it exactly, Francie," agreed Margaret. "Genius, like water, always finds its level, and" —

"Well, you 're both burning just a little, and if

everybody is through guessing, I 'll tell you," broke in Ursula, struggling with a wide smile of amusement and satisfaction.

"We 're all ears!" promptly declared Frances, and each girl immediately fell into what she considered the most comfortable position for listening: Margaret on the bench at her mother's feet; Ruth in a corner of the lounge, with Judy's head on her shoulder, Judy's hand fast locked in her own; and Frances sitting crosslegged on the floor, while Ursula took a seat on the edge of the table. "I can look at you all from here and talk better," she offered in excuse, and began her story.

"As you all know," she said, with a little confidential gesture, "it is n't long since I got my position in the Leader office. Of course," looking directly at her mother and Margaret, though what she was about to state was already as well known to them as to the rest of her audience, "being a beginner, I could n't expect much pay — I was only too thankful to be taken on at all. It was certainly a piece of great good fortune — for which I can thank uncle Gabe. Well, I was put in what 's called the 'exchange' room — where all the newspapers and magazines that come to the Leader are collected. These papers we — for there are two other girls at it beside myself — are expected to look carefully through, and cut out from them all the short bits of news, general information, etc., etc., that we think would be suitable to the Leader and interesting to its readers. These pieces we rewrite" —

"Why! you've told us about that lots of times before," interrupted Ruth. "Could n't you skip going over it again? We 're just hungry for the news!"

"It is extremely rude to interrupt," put in Margaret hastily, noticing Ursula's face, at the same time casting an imploring glance at the impatient Ruth.

Ursula colored up. "I can only tell the story in my own way," she said stiffly. "Those of you that don't care to listen to it may go out of the room. I know mother and Marnie will stay, if nobody else does."

"Of *course* we all want to hear it," and "Tell it just as you like," came in a hearty chorus from four of the assemblage; while Ruth tilted her blond head and studied the pattern of the ceiling with a great appearance of indifference.

"Well, I 'll make the rest as short as I can," resumed Ursula, the interest somewhat gone from her voice, though it soon returned as she went on. "As I was saying, we have to rewrite or edit these 'paragraphics,' as we call them. And they are used, in printing the Leader, to fill out odd places — around the advertisements or at the foot of a column — wherever a space occurs. The other two girls merely edit or arrange their paragraphics; they say that 's quicker and less trouble. So it is, but, as you people know, I love to write, and quite often — whenever I find an interesting subject — I rewrite mine entirely. Each day's work is put into a sealed envelope on which

is written the name of the person who has made the selections, and then handed in to the 'make-up' editor. He uses the paragraphics as he sees fit throughout the paper. But if he should n't approve of the selections, back they come to the unfortunate who has made them — and sometimes a few sharp words as well! This has happened two or three times to the other two girls in the exchange room, though they 've appeared not to mind it at all. *I* should have felt dreadfully mortified and disheartened, but they just laughed over it. Well, *this* morning" —

But just at this interesting point of the story there came another interruption.

"Oh, wait a minute! just one second!" broke in Frances excitedly. "Miss Weewee is scratching to come in." Rushing to the door, she opened it and admitted a sleek black cat, with a funny monkey-like little black and white face, and stiff fierce white eyebrows and whiskers that stood out prominently. Puss walked into the room with a stately measured tread and an air of bland assurance which was rudely disturbed by Frances, who snatched up the cat and hastily returned to her place. "There!" exclaimed the girl a little breathlessly, sinking down on the floor again and pressing the unwilling Miss Weewee into a recumbent position on her lap. "Now the family circle is complete. Go ahead, Ursa!"

"Wait another minute and I 'll close the front door," remarked Judith, suddenly rising from the lounge. "It has just occurred to me that it 's

open, and there 's no necessity of letting uncle Gabe's horrid-looking protégé hear all we say."

In almost less than the time she had specified Judy was back on the lounge, comfortably nestled against Ruth's shoulder. "Now tell us the rest," she said.

"I 've the greatest mind not to say another word of it!" exclaimed Ursula indignantly. "The idea of interrupting me for that old cat! And now you, Judith! I came home just brimming over with this news, thinking you people would be *so* interested — and I don't believe you care one particle!"

"Now don't make a fuss about nothing!" advised Ruth calmly; she always took her twin's part, unless the offense were against herself.

"Oh, but I *am* interested," protested Judith, and "Do go on!" urged Frances.

"You know very well, Ursula, that we are interested in all you have to tell us," remarked Mrs. Jeffrey.

And presently, swallowing her wrath, Ursula made another attempt to finish her story. "I 've almost forgotten where I was," she said listlessly.

"*This* morning," prompted Frances, with such an exact, unconscious imitation of Ursula's tone that everybody laughed, and as a result the atmosphere cleared wonderfully.

"Well, this morning," resumed Ursula, "one of the girls, a Miss Ireland, came to me in quite a state of excitement. 'The editor in chief has sent for the three of us,' she said. 'We are to go right

down to his office. I 'm awfully afraid something 's wrong with our work. I should have been more careful. I 'm alone in the world, and what I get here is all I have to live on.' I felt sorry for her; for though in the same box as far as money is concerned, I 'm so *much* better off than she is in having all you dear ones." With her annoyance quite forgotten, Ursula beamed affectionately on the circle of upturned, interested faces which reflected the love shining out on them through her own bright eyes. "So I tried to comfort her. 'Why jump to the conclusion that it 's trouble ahead of you?' I told her. 'This may mean something better than you have had' — for the minute I entirely forgot that I was in it, too. But she was determined to look on the dark side. And down we went to Mr. Driscal's office. He is a very cross-looking man, with a loud voice and a nervous, jerky, fierce manner. Why, when he makes the simplest remark you 'd almost think he was going to bite your head off! He is n't in the least polite. He soon let us know why he 'd sent for us. 'Each of you take a desk,' he said — he fairly roared; the offices are only partitioned off, and all open at the top, so everybody on that floor must have heard him; 'take a desk,' he said, 'and write me an article — a column length — on the conditions of the poor in New York city.' Then he swung round again in his swivel chair, and went on with his work as unconcernedly as if what had happened was a most ordinary every-day occurrence. But somehow we felt that this piece of

writing meant a great deal to us — perhaps our positions. So we took our places at the 'desks' — mine was an old table, with a game leg — and began. At least the other two girls began — I heard their pens scratching — but I could n't think of *one single* thing to write! I could n't concentrate my mind on the subject, try as I would. I could n't think of how to begin, or what to say. I felt a perfect fool!"

"Goodness me! do hurry on!" cried Margaret and Frances excitedly, as Ursula paused to take breath; she could not now complain of want of interest in her audience.

"The very sound of the other girls' pens rushing so rapidly over the paper seemed to add to the dreadful feeling of incompetency — of idiocy — that had hold of me," went on Ursula. "I wrote 'Conditions of the Poor' at the top of my paper; then sat and stared hopelessly at the wall before me, and thought of the most irrelevant, silliest subjects — what kind of a winter hat I should like to have, what mother might give us for dinner. Truly!" at the chorus of indignant, disappointed exclamations from the family. "As far as writing on the condition of the poor was concerned, my mind was a perfect blank! And what made matters worse was, that back of the horrible apathy was that strong conviction that this opportunity was one I should *always* regret having lost. Then, all at once, a curious feeling — a sort of doing-it-against-my-will feeling — made me look round, and there, to my left, in one of the small offices which

opened into our large room, was a man looking intently at me through the open door. I could see he was very tall, very slender, with a little stoop about the shoulders; and he had the most serious, *nicest* face that you could imagine! But his hair, girls!" Ursula threw out her hands and laughed merrily at the recollection. "It stood up in the funniest little spears all over his head — as if he 'd been running his hands wildly through it, or trying to comb his locks with the poker. You can't think what a comical contrast it presented to his serious face! But I very soon forgot all that in his great kindness. Looking straight at me, with the most earnest expression, he said in a low but perfectly distinct voice — the people in our office must have heard him: 'Don't be frightened; you can do what is required. Put it in story form — or any way you please — but write!' And as he said that, an idea flashed into my mind. 'Oh, thank you, *very* much!' I whispered back. I would have liked to have every letter in the sentence a capital, I felt so grateful to him. Then he shut his door to, and I began to write. And really, it seemed as if I could n't get the words on paper fast enough, they came into my mind so rapidly; was n't that queer? And I wrote about one of your poor people, Judy — about poor little Joe Foyle" —

"Oh, Ursula, did you? Oh, what did you say?" cried Judith. In an instant her little affectations of airy indifference fell away; she hastily sat up, and with eyes alight, her whole face kin-

dling, bent eagerly forward toward the girl on the table.

"I told of Joe's wretched home," replied Ursula, slowly, reflectively; "of his worthless father, his drunken mother; of his miserable, ragged condition; of how difficult it had been to get any hold whatever on him. I told of the suit of clothes — the only decent clothes of his life — that he had saved up for, penny by penny; of their effect upon him, and how through them he had (with infinite patience and a heroic faith in the existence of the divine spark in man) been gradually lifted to some slight sense of respectability. I told of how proud he had been of his new suit; how carefully it had been worn on Sundays and high days, and at other times been hidden in the most secret corner of his forlorn home, to escape his mother's hungry eyes. I told of his hiding the cherished garments, in desperation for a new place, in the oven of the old disused stove which, as he thought, stood in a forgotten corner of his home. I told of the discovery of them, and of Joe's bitter despair when he reached home one afternoon to find his clothes gone — for drink! I told it in story form — I added not one word to the truth. But oh, mother, girls! the pitifulness of the whole thing came to me with such force! It gripped my heart. I forgot all about Mr. Driscal, and that what I was setting down there was to come under his critical eye — I forgot all about 'space' and the paper — I simply *wrote!* My face was wet with tears when I got through."

There were tears now in Ursula's eyes, and she finished with a break in her voice; there were tears, too, in the eyes of those who were listening to her. They remembered the wild outburst of grief with which Joe had told his loss to his beloved "Miss Judit," and the reckless, unreachable lawlessness into which he had relapsed. "Ain't no use gi'n' me more clo'es — they 'll on'y go same way. I don' wan' no more," Joe had declared, in the bitterness of his heart, and had persisted in his resolve.

"Oh, my poor people! — my poor people!" cried Judith, springing up, a sharp sorrow in her voice that surprised the family; she was not given to such outbursts. "Oh, mother, girls," turning passionately to them, "you can't think how their trials and sorrows and wants weigh on me sometimes; how I feel for the poor things since I 've been a 'visitor' among them! Their life is so narrow and hard! And they 're only human beings; they crave warmth and comfort and happiness as well as the rest of us. God has put the same instincts into us all. It seems to me that I fairly *long* for money these days, to be able to do things for my poor people — things that one can't expect the Church or the Societies to do. I mean, to give a treat here and there to some poor, overworked mother who is all tired out and discouraged, and needs cheering up; or a little inexpensive present to another, something bright and pretty; I would n't care whether 't was a frivolous something or not, so long as it gave genuine pleasure. And for

my boys and girls — ah!" (the color flamed into Judith's pale face) "I want a *great* deal for them. First and foremost, a splendid big playground — with grass in summer, on which they could sit and walk and run whenever they pleased; with great heaps of earth, too, and sand standing about — in winter and at all times — where the children could play and roll and tumble" — Judith broke off abruptly. "Do you know," she said sharply, "that some of my boys hardly know their Mother Earth except as a handful in a little clay flower-pot, or as builders' property, off which they are chased if they dare set foot on it? Remember our mud pies in the country, girls, our rolls in the sand, our forts and caves, our joy, and then pity these poor, defrauded children! If I could get a big, big place for them, where they could play ball and marbles and tennis, fly kites, skip ropes — do any and everything that would make their bodies healthy — I 'm *sure* their minds and souls would grow healthy, too. 'T would make better girls and boys; by and by, better men and women, better fathers and mothers, better citizens. Only a playground to do all that. But I have n't the money to get it for them — not one cent!" With a tragic gesture and a sharp indrawing of her breath that was almost a sob, Judith sank down on the lounge again and buried her face in her twin's shoulder.

There was a sympathetic silence. Then, in the loving, tranquil manner that had so often given comfort to her children, Mrs. Jeffrey said: "Don't

get discouraged, daughter. Do the lesser things that come as your portion — do them cheerfully and well and — leave the greater ones in God's hands. Until the fund and the playground come, do your best with what is in your power, and be thankful for it."

"And what became of your paper, Ursa?" asked Margaret presently.

"Oh yes — I did n't finish," Ursula said, with a little start of recollection. "And that 's the best part of the story, too. Well, the papers were handed to Mr. Driscal, and we only heard the result just before leaving the office. As it turns out the morning's work *was* a test, and the result stands like this: Miss Halliday's paper was 'turned down,' and she goes away — she says she does n't care. Miss Ireland's paper was also refused, but she is to stay on and continue the paragraphic work. And my little story" — Ursula paused, and smiled provokingly at the eager family.

"Oh, go on!" they cried breathlessly.

"My little story is accepted, and will be published in to-morrow's paper; our Saturday number, you know. Is n't that perfectly amazing? Wait — wait — there 's more to tell," as Frances hastily arose, to Miss Weewee's great surprise and disgust, and with a shout of delight fell upon Ursula's neck. "Furthermore, Mr. Driscal has directed me to write another story, for next Saturday's paper; in fact, a series of short stories on the same lines as this first one, and which will

appear in the paper from week to week. Besides, I 'm to try my 'prentice hand at a short article now and then. And how do you suppose Mr. Driscal came to think I could do such work? The make-up editor told me — just those very paragraphics that I had written. He noticed them in the paper, and asked whose work they were. Little did I dream they would bring me this advancement. I only hope I may not fall short of what is expected of me."

For a moment Ursula looked dubious, but the confident assurance of the family that she would be sure to be more than equal to all the demands made upon her, and their prophecy of a brilliant future, soon sent her spirits up again.

"Some of the people in the office say it is a fine beginning," she said, with modest pride. "And on my way out, this afternoon, I met the gentleman who had given me courage when I most needed it. I feel I owe my success to his kindness, and I told him so, at which he seemed much surprised. 'I have sisters,' he said, as if that explained the whole proceeding. Then, presently, when we had talked together for a few minutes, he pulled out his card, and in the most simple, straightforward, and solemn fashion presented it to me. 'I am in the office every day. Should you need assistance at any time, I hope you will not hesitate to call upon me for it,' he told me. My dears, from his manner you would have imagined him a grandfather, at the very least! Here 's the card."

"I don't like your making acquaintance in that

way — with strange men!" exclaimed Mrs. Jeffrey uneasily.

But her daughters were crowding their heads together over the small piece of pasteboard, and a chorus of voices announced, "John Minot Rose!"

"That's his name, mother," added Ursula. "And he is n't a 'strange man' at all. He is a most valued member of the Leader editorial staff, and the author of those stories that we all like so much — 'The Passing of our Little Brother, the Lark,' and 'In the Heart of the Woods,' and others. Don't you remember them?"

"Oh, *I* know who he is — I know him! And he 's just as nice as he can be!" cried Margaret eagerly, and somewhat incoherently. "He belongs to a large family — they all visit Miss Austin and her brother; they call him 'Jack Rose.' Oh, they are nice people, mother! I know all about them. He has four married sisters: Nannie, who is Mrs. Maxwell Derwent; she often brings her two boys and her little girl to see Miss Austin. They 're lively young persons, too, I can tell you. And I believe there is a baby. Then there 's Nora — Mrs. Chadwick Whitcombe — who is very beautiful and refined and fashionable, and knows it. Mrs. Hilliard Erveng is the one I like best — 'quicksilver Betty,' Miss Austin calls her. She is so merry and bright — a perfect contrast to her sober, rather dull-looking husband. Mrs. Erveng has two children — a sturdy boy, and a shy blossom of a little girl named Alice. Another sister, Katharine, was married last spring to an English-

man, the Honorable Mr. Warwick, and is now living in England. Miss Austin says this Mr. Warwick was once very much in love with Mrs. Erveng, before she married. There is still another sister — Mädel; she lives in the old home with her father (who writes books about the Ancients) and her brother, Mr. Felix Rose, and his wife. Mr. Felix Rose has charge of the Austins' law affairs; he is a prominent lawyer, and his wife is a noble woman. I admire her immensely! She is always so sweet and friendly to me. I've spoken of it here at home many a time — you people must remember. I'm sure you'd all love her for it. She knows I am a gentlewoman, even if I am Miss Austin's paid companion!" The rich color deepened in Margaret's cheeks, and her brilliant eyes grew proud.

"Well! I should think she *would* know it!" exclaimed Ursula, with such angry energy that the family had to laugh, and "Don't explode, Ursa!" warned Judith.

"Mrs. Felix, as Miss Austin calls her," continued Margaret, enjoying the position of historian, "has one child, another Felix, and I believe old Mr. Rose is as fond of his son's wife as if she were his own daughter. The young men — Jack Rose, and Paul and Alan Rose, his brothers — all visit at the Austins'. They are musical, and sometimes Miss Austin has me come in to play accompaniments, when they call of an evening. Paul has the reputation of being very brilliant. I know he is very sarcastic, and, *I* think, conceited.

Alan is a pleasant sort of fellow; not a bit intellectual, but honest and well-meaning, and devoted to Paul. They are both at college. But best of them all I like Mr. Jack Rose. Oh, by the way," with a sudden assumption of carelessness, and bestowing close attention on the folds of the old tablecloth which she was shaking out, "he knows Jim — Jim Ivors. I mean Mr. Rose told me the other day that he knows Jim. Now," determinedly ignoring an exclamation of interest from Ursula, "is n't it about time that some one went out and rescued uncle Gabe from that tiresome protégé of his? I 've been here almost all the afternoon, and I have n't seen him for more than a few minutes. That horrid man never knows when to go."

"I 'll send him off. He 'll be sure to have borrowed every cent the dear old boy had in his pocket," asserted Frances.

Going to the front door she opened it, and in a tone of subdued excitement called, "Uncle — uncle Gabriel! Margaret is here, and waiting to see you. Could n't you come at once?"

"That will fetch him," she declared, returning to the family.

CHAPTER II

UNCLE GABE

In a few minutes after his niece's call Mr. Kincaid tripped lightly into the dining-room, wearing an air half jubilant, half deprecating.

"Well, Gabriel, that man has made a visitation!" "Aren't you exhausted, uncle Gabe?" "How much did he borrow this time?" "He is a fraud — a humbug, sir!" were some of the remarks offered to the gentleman by his sister and his nieces.

The Reverend Gabriel Kincaid had no size to boast of; he was barely of medium height, slender, not to say thin, and so round-shouldered that his much-worn shiny sack coat went up in the back and sagged ungracefully in front. His clerical waistcoat and bagged-at-the-knees trousers also showed more than signs of long use. A little black silk skullcap — pushed well off his forehead, and now rakishly askew — covered uncle Gabe's bald head, allowing just a fringe of brown hair mixed with gray to appear below its rim. Gray was in the slight brown mustache as well, and plentifully streaked the short pointed beard which its owner was so fond of stroking as he talked. Spectacles protected a pair of small, pro-

minent, short-sighted brown eyes; and there was a fine color in uncle Gabriel's cheeks, a jaunty smile upon his lips. This last, however, and his jubilant expression vanished at the remarks that met him, and he looked distressed.

"My dears, you must not judge so harshly," he said, in mild rebuke. "You would never say such unkind things if you knew the unfortunate man's story. He has passed through deep waters — *de-ep* waters!" Uncle Gabriel sighed heavily and stroked his beard.

"Well, now, confess," urged Frances, who was her uncle's favorite, shaking a saucy finger at him. "Did n't that 'unfortunate' — now don't look as if I 'd called him names — did n't he borrow money of you to-day? Did n't he?"

Mr. Kincaid showed signs of guilt. The bright spot of red in his cheeks deepened, and he looked deprecatingly at his women folk. "I had but a quarter to my name," he said. "And what was that to a hungry man?"

"Did n't I tell you! Had it been a dollar, he 'd have gotten it just the same," asserted Frances, with conviction. "Uncle Gabe, that man comes only for what he can get out of you. He has a horrid face — a hardened convict might look as he does." Mr. Kincaid gave a start. "And he 's entirely too big and fat to be in a starving condition," went on Frances. "Can't make me believe that! You 've gotten him two situations: why did n't he keep them, and not be coming here two or three times a week, borrowing the little money

you have? We think him a fraud, a regular humbug — and I 'm almost positive he is! He is just imposing on you!"

"Oh no, he is n't, my dear," returned uncle Gabriel, with equal conviction. "I was n't born yesterday; I understand human nature," with a sagacious wag of his head, "*pretty* well. This poor creature has had a most checkered existence — a most sad life! He has been falsely accused, been infamously wronged" —

"That 's the story *he* tells; how d' you know it 's true?" interpolated Margaret.

But Mr. Kincaid turned a deaf ear, and went on with his remarks: "He has fallen into evil — lost his good name and his dear ones — and is now repentant and seeking the forgiveness of his God. I would have the heart of a stone, not of a fellow man, to turn from him now. What is a quarter, or a dollar, or" — growing emphatic — "dollars, in comparison with the bringing of a lost son home to his Father! This poor fellow — his name is Jared Watkins" (uncle Gabe waved his hand in the direction of the hall, as if introducing his departed protégé) — "this poor fellow comes to me with his trials and sorrows, and his efforts toward a better life; would I be a faithful minister of the Gospel, a true follower of the Master, to turn my back on him? Now tell me that!" Mr. Kincaid finished abruptly, took off his glasses and began rubbing them vigorously with a small piece of chamois which he drew out of his coat pocket, meanwhile peering in his short-

sighted fashion at his sister, who sat silent and with a contrite face.

The girls, too, though unconvinced, were silent for a brief space; then Judith said, in a tone that might be considered apologetic: "You see, uncle Gabe, I know all about *my* poor people. I go to see them in their homes, and have ways of knowing that what they tell me is true, and that the help they get is put to good use. But *you do* get deceived; some of your protégés *have* taken a mean advantage of your kindness. And we hate to see you imposed on — again. That 's why we spoke."

Uncle Gabriel was willing to accept to the utmost all that Judith's tone might imply. "Well — eh — well — perhaps it looks a little that way," he reluctantly admitted, though with a kindly glance at his niece through the glasses which were once more astride his well-defined Roman nose. "But," brightening up, "if even only one out of ten was benefited, comforted, heartened on the way, that more than compensates for the imposition of the other nine. Does n't it? Eh? Better for me to be imposed on — er — occasionally," with an airy wave of his hand, "than that I should refuse or slight one fellow creature that asks for assistance or needs it — eh?" Mr. Kincaid put his hands in the pockets of his trousers and rattled loudly the keys he had there, beaming on the family with an expression that said plainly, "That clinches the argument."

Everybody smiled, while Ursula flew at her uncle, and pulling off his cap kissed the top of his

bald head. "You dear, blessed, innocent Doctor Primrose!" she exclaimed. "Now let 's drop the protégé, and I 'll tell you something unexpected that 's happened to me to-day" — which she immediately proceeded to do, encouraged to a full and detailed account by the suggestions and reminders of her mother and sisters.

Uncle Gabriel listened with the most sympathetic interest. "Well — well!" he exclaimed, when Ursula finished. "If this is n't splendid news! Well, you deserve it, Ursula — you 're a good girl. You 'll make good use of this opening; I 'm glad you 've got it. Now you 're all breadwinners," glancing around the circle of his nieces, "all bringing in something toward the support of the home. You, Margaret," pointing at her with the long lean forefinger of the scholar, "are Miss Austin's companion; Ursula, you have only to go on as you 've begun and you 'll be a noted writer yet; you, Judith, have your visiting among the poor — which should prove as helpful to you as to them; Ruth has her beautiful art embroidery; and Frances"—

"And Frances is the dummy of the family," interrupted that young person, with unexpected heat, and clutching the unsuspecting Miss Weewee to her with cruel force (which that feline immediately resented by making a precipitous descent over the shoulder against which she had been resting). "Frances can do nothing but take the hard-earned money of her sisters to pay for singing lessons — money that she may never be able to return! I 'm the only drone in the hive. If

you people could know how *mean* I feel sometimes!"

"Why, Francie, child, you are my right hand, here at home!" "Now, Frances, don't you say such silly and unkind things!" "Would n't you do as much for one of us?" "And when you know the hopes we all centre in you!" cried the mother and sisters, in respective tones of encouragement and exasperation.

Mr. Kincaid threw a glance of mild rebuke at his favorite, and calmly continued his remarks. "Now if I could but find a parish, we would all be doing well," he said.

"Why, uncle Gabe, I thought you were editing two papers!" exclaimed Margaret. "You told me so once, when I was at home."

"Yes, my dear, he does edit two papers," put in Judith, before her uncle could reply. "But they are so poorly off for funds and have so small a circulation that the editor's salary comes in spasmodic, semi-no-time payments. That 's the Hebrew paper. The Italian one has never paid him a cent. And the car fares the dear creature has spent going to the office — it 's away downtown, by the river — the time and trouble and money he has expended on the poor Italians who read the paper and come to him with their tales of woe, can neither be counted nor measured! Sometimes he has three and four of them at a time, out in the hall. And they are always the hungriest people!" Judith gave her twin sister a little reminiscent nudge, and they both laughed.

"It 's a shame for uncle Gabe to be wasting his talents in such work," declared Ruth, in her soft, slow voice. "He should be president of some college, or have a professorship" — The sentence broke off abruptly, at a warning glance from Margaret. In one short year, long ago, while holding a professorship in a Western college, uncle Gabriel had lost his young wife and little son, and had suffered a grievous wrong as well, and the wounds were still tender. "He — he — knows so many languages," finished Ruth lamely.

But it is doubtful if Mr. Kincaid had heard her. He stood looking out at the patch of blue sky which was visible through the western window, and thoughtfully stroking his beard.

"You see, Margaret, it 's this way," he said, turning and addressing his eldest niece. "The Hebrews pay me whenever they 've got the money. They are thoroughly honest. When they have n't got it, why, I can't expect it. The Italians can't pay me, for the simple reason that they 've barely enough to keep the paper afloat — to pay for paper, printing, etc. Only one man gets paid, and," stoutly, "he ought to be; he can't find another thing to do, and he has a wife and child to support." (Uncle Gabriel did not add, as he might have done, that he had voluntarily made over his salary as editor in chief to this man, though still cheerfully and faithfully fulfilling all the duties of the post.) "And if I gave up the paper it would go to pieces," went on Mr. Kincaid; "for, you know, my dear," with the most innocent, unconscious

egoism, "it is n't *everybody* who has my knowledge of languages. Never been the slightest trouble to me to learn a language! Let me see;" he stopped stroking his beard, and began counting on his long thin fingers: "English, French, German, Italian — those I speak almost equally well. Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Sanskrit, I know thoroughly; Spanish and the Norse tongues I read. More than ten in all!" Sticking his hands in his pockets, uncle Gabriel rattled his keys loudly and beamed upon his niece, bright-eyed and smiling — in simple, genuine admiration of what he called his "gift." "Seems if I ought to make something out of all that, doesn't it?" he asked proudly. "Why, Helmud, you know — President Helmud, of Harvan College — used to say to me, again and again: 'Kincaid, I 'd give a *good* deal for your knowledge of languages. It 's phenomenal!' And there is n't a man-jack that comes into that little river office, no matter what part of Italy he hails from, that I can't talk to him, and understand and be understood by him. It 's just a gift I have — in liberal measure, too — ha! ha!" Then a shade fell upon uncle Gabriel's expressive face; his eyes returned to the blue patch of sky. "But I 'd give it all up to-morrow, to have a parish," he said wistfully.

"Don't you be disheartened, Gabriel," came in Mrs. Jeffrey's quiet tones. "You 'll get a parish yet, and all the better one for having waited so long for it."

"I 'm not looking for a soft berth," put in her brother hastily. "I want a parish where will be

plenty of work. I 'm not afraid of it, so long as I can still have a little time for study. I 'm not too old for hard work; you know I 'm several years this side of fifty, Etta. I 'm a good way yet from the 'dead line.'" Uncle Gabe held his thin little figure erect for a few minutes, and straightened his stooping shoulders. "You do think I 'll get a parish? I don't look too old to have one, do I?" he asked, with an earnestness that was pathetic. His eyes passed swiftly over five of his women folk, and finally rested upon Judith. The critical faculty was strongest in her; she was not so easily influenced by emotion. "Do I?" he repeated, addressing his question to her.

And while the rest of the family waited, in surprise that she did not at once respond, Judith looked carefully at her uncle.

"Well, uncle Gabe," she remarked presently (calmly ignoring Francie's outburst of "Oh, do, for goodness' sake, say something!"), "I don't see why you should n't be called to a parish; you certainly do not look superannuated. There are a good many gray hairs in your beard, but except for that, it seems to me, as far as I can remember, that you don't look one day older than you did ten years ago, when I was a little girl. No, you are certainly not too old to have a parish, and do good work in it, too."

Mr. Kincaid blew kisses to his niece from his finger tips. "I shall remember you in my will, Judith," he remarked facetiously; then went over and stooped himself before the low, narrow mirror

in the sideboard. "H'm!" he murmured uneasily, stroking his beard and turning his head from side to side to obtain different views. "There *are* a good many gray hairs in it. More gray than brown — I should n't wonder."

The door that led into the kitchen slowly opened, and from behind the screen which stood before it appeared the short square figure of a girl whose light flaxen braids were folded flat against the back of her head, and whose round stolid blue eyes turned interrogatively on her mistress.

"Time for set table — no?" she asked, with a strong German accent.

"Why, there 's Gretchen! I had no idea 't was so late!" exclaimed Mrs. Jeffrey, beginning hurriedly to fold up her sewing. "Francie, stay and help me straighten things, will you, dear? The rest of you good people will please go into the sitting-room and remain there until tea is ready. How dark it has grown! Light the gas in our hall, Ursula."

It was as the light flared into existence, with her hand still upstretched to the gas fixture, that Ursula whispered over her shoulder to Margaret, "Marnie, Jim is coming this evening — right after tea." Her tone was that of one who imparts pleasant news, but Margaret's eyebrows went together in a quick frown, and the color sprang warm and vivid into her cheeks.

"I *do* wish I could be at home for one visit — just one — without Jim Ivors having to come poking in!" she cried angrily, with an impatient, petulant shake of her shoulders.

"Why, Margaret!" exclaimed Ursula, in great surprise, wheeling sharply round upon her sister, the burnt match still between her fingers. "To feel that way about dear old Jim that we 've known ever since we were born — Jim who cares so much for you! You should be ashamed to talk so. This is something new — what 's come over you?" Her keen eyes searched the beautiful face that was so provokingly unreadable. "You don't half appreciate Jim," Ursula said severely.

"Very likely not — I never pretended to," retorted the perverse Margaret, walking away.

And presently, after staring for several minutes in a thoughtful, absent-minded fashion at the burnt match, Ursula threw it away, and followed her sister into the sitting-room.

CHAPTER III

ONLY JIM IVORS

THE Jeffreys' drawing-room was a cosy place. There were a few somewhat worn but handsome pieces of furniture in it, which, at the sale made necessary by Mr. Jeffrey's sudden death, a few years ago, had been bought in and presented to the widow and children by his creditors. These — among them was a fine upright piano — filled a good deal of space, but added greatly to the interest of the small room, as did the quaint silver lamp, some rare bits of old family china, and the two or three good pictures which hung upon the walls. There were window seats, of home manufacture, covered with pretty, inexpensive material, and on them plump cushions to make the recesses inviting. Bright-colored cushions heaped up on the lounge partly concealed its faded cover, and lent picturesque color to the surroundings. A banjo, in its green baize jacket, stood in a corner near the piano, and there were books, on bookshelves and tables, in plenty.

The care of this apartment fell chiefly upon Frances, it being the family dictum that that young person had "wonderfully good taste in arranging a room;" and Francie's opinion of the

little drawing-room had been frequently expressed. "It is n't grand," she would say, pausing for a last look, dust-cloth and feather duster in hand, "but," her eyes lingering in affectionate pride on each cherished object, "anybody would know it belonged to refined people."

And on this evening the little room fully justified her estimate of it, with the silver lamp shedding abroad its soft glow, and in the air the delightful fragrance of the one large rose which stood in a tall slender vase on the mantelpiece.

The two men who had come in to spend the evening congratulated themselves on being in such comfortable quarters. In his inner consciousness Carter Ferris was classifying them as "bang up," and Jim Ivors's eyes traveled with great satisfaction around the room, which was his ideal of home, coming back to rest longest on Margaret's beautiful face as she lounged in the old-fashioned "spindle" chair.

Jim was in fine spirits. Margaret's presence had always that effect upon him, and besides, tonight he had a piece of "good luck" to impart that he felt sure would be of more than ordinary interest to his friends; some hopes and plans to discuss with one of them, the mere thought of which set his big happy heart thumping heavily against his ribs, and filled him with a restless longing for the end of the evening, when he expected to take Margaret back to the Austins'. By nature Jim was a cheerful creature; care sat lightly upon him. He enjoyed his profession of artist, and that

it brought in barely enough to live on had, until within the last few years, been to him a matter of small moment. But now — well, now that consideration was of supreme importance. Jim's habits were simple, his dress indifferent, his main idea on that subject, as far as himself was concerned, being that clothes were made to be worn out. To-night, his gay-colored necktie was faded and worn, and there were faded daubs of color on his black velvet painting jacket, as Margaret noted. "The idea of his wearing that jacket here, and those trousers!" she thought, looking at him with new, severely critical eyes. "Who but Jim Ivors would ever wear such light trousers in winter! Why does n't he dress like Carter Ferris and — and — well, other people?"

Not being conscious of her criticism Jim was undisturbed by it, and his gayety infected the rest of the company. Sitting down to the piano he went through his répertoire of songs — four, and all to the same accompaniment — trolling out the words that came in the lower notes, and dropping into a full sweet whistle where the melody changed into an upper key.

Stimulated by Jim's example, others in the company began contributing to the general entertainment. Carter played dashing dance tunes that set everybody's feet twinkling under their chairs; and dragging her uncle into the little square corner of the outer hall, Frances whirled him around until the reverend gentleman's untrained heels flew out wildly, and he cried for mercy. After

that the same young lady favored the company with a spring song of Chaminade's, rendered in a voice so sweet, so clear and true, that the sisters looked at each other with open pride. Uncle Gabriel was persuaded to sing his favorite "Three Kings of Orient We," and Judith followed with some wild, weird Norse music.

It was under cover of this last that Jim made an opportunity for a few words with Margaret. "Peggie, I 've got a fine piece of luck for you," he whispered. "I 'll tell you all about it soon 's we have a chance to talk — when I 'm seeing you home by and" —

"That necktie you 've got on looks as if you 'd given it hard service," interrupted Margaret, quickly and irrelevantly. She eyed her friend closely as he knelt near her chair, at the low music rack, balancing a pile of more or less dilapidated sheet music on one of his knees clad in the objectionable light trousers. Ostensibly Jim was hunting for a song for Frances ; in reality his hand was turning the sheets aimlessly, his merry brown eyes gazing up at Margaret, full of an expression which to-night she did not care to see. Jim *was* handsome, she was compelled to admit to herself, but — "It is black with age, and all frayed," she continued severely. "I do think you might take a little more interest in your appearance."

"Why, you said you liked this red tie on me!" exclaimed Jim in surprise, patting his neckgear, and lines of perplexity furrowing his broad white forehead that was in such contrast to the ruddy face below it.

"Because a thing is becoming is no reason for putting it on and wearing it until it literally falls to pieces," remarked Margaret austerely. "Every time I've seen you, for weeks, you have had on that tie. Don't you know that 'variety is the spice of life'?"

Jim did not mention that the red tie had been donned so continuously in the hope of finding favor in her eyes, should they meet during the hours of each day when he left his bare little studio and haunted Washington Square, where lived the Austins. Instead he gave the limp music on his knee an impatient shove, which sent it sliding to the floor. "Oh, bother clothes!" he observed brusquely. "Life is too short to be worrying over such trifles."

"Oh, very well; just as you like," retorted his companion coolly.

But to be annoyed with Margaret, to-night especially, was not easy to Jim. "Say, Peggie," he whispered presently, persuasively, to induce the fair, averted face to turn again on him, "d' you remember that quaint little table you fancied, the last evening I took you home — the antique we saw in Bowles's window — with the slender twisted legs and a flap to lift up? Well" — there was a happy, triumphant note in Jim's voice, the music still lay unheeded on the floor, and his hand was on the arm of the spindle chair — "I know your weakness for tables in general, that table in particular, and — I've bought it."

Margaret turned sharply on him. "Jim! —

that *dear* little table?" she exclaimed, with sparkling eyes.

Jim set his lips together in a funny, prim fashion that he had when very much pleased, and nodded at her. "That one, and no other," he assured her. "You wanted it, so I invested as soon as I could. Now that makes — let me see" — resting an elbow on the chair, to balance himself, he began counting on his palm — "this table, the little cabinet to hang against the wall, the three-cornered chair, the old sofa (that 'll have to be reupholstered), two cushions, and a screen. Accumulating, is n't it? And I don't let the fellows sit on or handle those things, Peggie — you understand?" Jim was very fond of that expression. "Except when I use any of 'em in a picture they 're in a corner of the studio, well covered up, waiting for" — his voice dropped to the merest whisper, but such a happy whisper! — "you know what for, Peggie!"

But with a sudden, impetuous movement Margaret was gone — out of the chair, out of the room — leaving Jim, still on his knees, to gaze wonderingly after her, and then begin hurriedly shuffling the limp music into a disorderly pile.

"Oh, if I could only have mother to myself for ten minutes, even, I 'd tell her everything," thought Margaret, as she sped through the rooms. Yet, when she reached the dining-room, it was with almost a sense of relief that she found uncle Gabriel there and Ruth, besides her mother. Of course, she told herself, while they were there a confidential talk was impossible.

"Well, daughter, the home visit is slipping fast away. I wish I could make it twice as long. I miss my first baby," Mrs. Jeffrey said affectionately, smiling up into Margaret's flushed face. "Let those gay people in the sitting-room do without you for a while; sit down here by me, and we 'll have a quiet little talk." She motioned to a chair by her side, into which the tall daughter immediately dropped. "You say the Austins are invariably kind and considerate; are you sure you 're happy there, my dear?" With a swift intuition the mother eyes searched Margaret's countenance.

"Suppose you and I adjourn to the giddy crowd in the front room," Mr. Kincaid proposed to Ruth, laying down the newspaper he had been scanning. "I presume that piece of embroidery could be held over until to-morrow."

There was a simultaneous outcry. "Oh, you need n't go, uncle Gabe!" and, "Why, Margaret has n't anything to say to mother that the rest of us can't hear!" exclaimed the two girls — Margaret hastily, almost appealingly, Ruth in a soft yet injured drawl, at the mere suggestion of a secret from the family. Further discussion of the subject was prevented by the appearance of Ursula and Jim. "It 's so warm in there that we thought we 'd come out and get a breath of fresh air," explained Ursula for the benefit of all, but with a pointed look of reproof at her elder sister, which that young woman calmly ignored.

"Anyway, I 'd rather be here — so cosy out

here, and — and quiet," brilliantly remarked Jim, appropriating the empty chair beside Margaret. "You 're a niee one to run off in that fashion!" he said to her in a reproachful undertone, but with imploring eyes which Margaret refused to see.

Jim was a prime favorite with Mrs. Jeffrey; she had known him from his juvenile days of knickerbockers and tops and marbles, and her interest in his artistic success was great. He still retained his childish name of "aunt Jeffa" for Mrs. Jeffrey, and found a welcome in the home whenever he chose to claim it, which was very often. Now, at sight of her favorite, the good lady's thoughts instantly turned to hospitality.

"Ruth, get some glasses and ice water, and a bottle of my orange syrup," she said. "Perhaps Jim would like to taste it."

"*Would* I? Just try me!" declared Jim, in an ecstatic tone that signified orange syrup was the one beverage in life for which he craved.

But he was not to enjoy it this evening.

While Ruth was setting the glasses on the table, and uncle Gabriel was valiantly drawing the cork of the home-made syrup, the party received a sudden reinforcement. Frances came dashing through the short entry, and, pausing at the door, regarded the signs of festivity with an indignation that promptly found voice.

"Well, of all mean people!" she exclaimed feelingly, addressing her sisters. "To steal away one after another, and leave poor Judy and me to do all the entertaining! And here you are en-

joying yourselves — orange syrup, and everything! I 'm going to stay here and have a good time, too," taking a seat by the table as she spoke.

"You 'll see Judith pretty soon," Frances went on, with a warning shake of the head. "She 's talked Art and Music" — her tone signified capitals — "to that man" — she suddenly remembered he was Jim's friend — "that — er — Mr. Ferris — until she 's fairly exhausted. I know she is. I stayed to help her, and stared at him until my eyes felt as if they were crossed, and I really *could n't* swallow any more yawns; then I had to come out. Mother" — Francie's tone grew severe— "I *do* think the girls should go in. Judy 'll be perfectly raving, to 've been left alone so long. Could n't we have the orange syrup in the front room?"

"No, no — oh, don't let us go in! It 's so much nicer out here!" cried Margaret; which, of course, Jim eagerly seconded.

"Yes, Francie, I think we should," agreed Ursula, rising; and Mrs. Jeffrey gave a ready assent. "Certainly, serve it in the drawing-room, if you all prefer that," she said.

Whrrrrr! went the electric bell that was connected with the street door of the house. There was an unexpectedness about it that made everybody start, and brought the stout little maid from behind the screen with amazing celerity.

"Goodness! who can that be?" questioned Ruth. "No visitors, surely, at this hour of the evening," glancing at the clock on the mantel.

"Who can it be?" wondered one or two others, but not Margaret.

With a sudden vivid rush of color that dyed forehead and ears and deepened the peach bloom in her cheeks, Margaret rose and hastily made her way out of the room. At the door she turned and spoke in a laughing voice, though her heart was making frightened bounds that nearly took away her breath: "Well, come on, then, if you want to. We 'll all go in the sitting-room. Come, come!"

Jim followed her; so did Ursula and Frances.

Ruth set the tray of glasses down hard on the table, and resuming her seat took up her embroidery again, her delicate red lips drooping at the corners. "I do think that sometimes Margaret is so changeable!" she complained, while Mrs. Jeffrey and Mr. Kincaid waited for the second ring, which should announce the visitor's arrival at the front door of the apartment.

No one but Gretchen had heard Margaret's hurried instructions as the maid stood pressing the electric button. "If it 's a gentleman, ask him to step to the drawing-room door, and I 'll let him in."

"Gen'man — front room," with a pointing finger over her shoulder, was all that Gretchen's English and knowledge could furnish in answer to her mistress's "Who?"

But they were not long left in ignorance, for Frances and Judith came rushing out, eager to tell. "Oh, mother, guess who 's in there!" cried Judy, so intent upon being the first to tell the news that she quite forgot her usual air of dignity.

"Oh, mother, it 's" — began Frances.

"It is Mr. *Austin*," determinedly finished Judith.

Involuntarily Mrs. Jeffrey had risen to receive their message; now she as involuntarily sat down again. "Mr. Austin!" she repeated, in a voice somewhat weak with surprise.

Miss Weewee, who had been the unwilling prisoner and companion of Gretchen, having made her escape, now emerged from behind the screen and leaped upon the table. Sitting up very straight, with her tail wrapped closely around her four little white paws, she fixed her green eyes upon Mrs. Jeffrey with an expression of the most profound and yearning interest. The object of pussy's attention was too occupied to appreciate this evidence of affectionate regard, but Frances nudged Judith. "Oh, do look at Weewee!" she said, with a giggle.

"Mr. — Austin," remarked uncle Gabriel reflectively, giving, in a violent effort after memory, his black silk skullcap a shove which sent it rakishly over one ear. "Why, Austins are the people Margaret 's with, eh?"

"Yes," put in Frances glibly, determined to have some say, "and he walked in as naturally as if he 'd been coming here lots of times. Not a word of apology for calling so late; and he has upset everything. I don't mean the furniture," she hastily explained, at the look of alarm on her uncle's face, "but the enjoyment. Marnie is talking to him very pleasantly — of course, she

knows him — but Ursula acts as if she 'd swallowed a ramrod, she is so stiff. Mr. Ferris looks bored — nobody 's taking much notice of him now. And as for Jim, he just glowers at Mr. Austin as if " —

" Frances, you certainly should be a reporter; you have the graphic tongue of a ready writer," hastily interrupted Judith, noting her mother's disturbed face.

Mrs. Jeffrey rose. " Come, Gabriel," she said, a touch of more than ordinary decision in her manner. " Come in with me."

" Why, certainly, my dear," cheerfully acquiesced uncle Gabe.

" Come on, Ruth," whispered Judith, preparing to fall into file behind the small procession.

Ruth shook her head. " The sitting-room 'll be full enough without an extra one being in it," she said practically. " And I 'm not so crazy to see Mr. Austin. I 'd rather stay here with my embroidery and Miss Weewee."

Frances's description of the state of affairs had not been far wrong, as Mrs. Jeffrey realized when she reached the drawing-room. Carter Ferris did look bored. Ursula had assumed a coldness of demeanor unusual to her and not conducive to general hilarity. Jim stood by the mantel, not far from the newcomer, an unmistakable scowl on his forehead, his mouth set, and a fierce light in his brown eyes. Margaret was talking rapidly, with a desperate attempt at her usual ease of manner. She welcomed her mother eagerly.

"Mother, uncle Gabriel, this is Mr. Austin," she said; and the tall, delicate-looking man who stood leaning against the mantel came forward and acknowledged the introduction with cordiality and easy grace.

"I am very happy to be allowed to make your acquaintance," he said, and there was genuine sincerity in his voice.

Roger Austin was a much older man than Jim Ivors. Although his hair was still thick there was a well-defined patch of gray on each temple, and some gray in the short close-cropped line of whiskers that marked the sides of his pale, plain-shaven, refined face. Mr. Austin looked just what he was — a kindly, formal, well-bred man of the world. His dress was irreproachable without being foppish, and offered a strong contrast to Jim's faded red necktie, his variegated painting jacket, and light summer trousers, though Jim was unquestionably the handsomer of the two men. But with Margaret, comparing them this evening, Jim's good looks carried very little weight.

Mrs. Jeffrey's reception of Mr. Austin, though perfectly polite, was marked with reserve, and in spite of the well-meant efforts of one or two of the party conversation languished in a fashion usually unknown in that little parlor. And the troubled expression in the mother's eyes deepened when presently Margaret rose, and, with a questioning glance at Mr. Austin, murmured hesitatingly, "I suppose I — had better be going — it 's getting late."

"Whenever you are ready I am at your service," he courteously assured her.

Mrs. Jeffrey hastened after her daughter, but Jim was ahead of her. Leaving the room in the most open and precipitous manner he caught up to Margaret in a few seconds.

"Peggie," he said abruptly, his hand closing tight around her arm, "*I* am to take you home."

Margaret resented his masterful tone; her face hardened. "Indeed you are not!" she declared, throwing her head up angrily. "Let go my arm this minute!"

Jim's hand dropped; his eyes and voice alike grew wistful, imploring. "Ah, Peggie, I *want* to talk with you. I've a splendid piece of news to tell you, something you'd love to hear," he urged. Then, as Margaret began walking away from him, he added desperately, "I've sold my picture, 'Off the Coast of Maine' — sold it before it's finished or on exhibition." A note of exultation relieved Jim's sombre earnestness. "Farley brought a California big gun to see the picture, and he bought it on the spot. Paid a good price for it, too. Don't you want to hear how much? It's a good price, you understand? I want to tell you all about it. *You* know what this success means to you and me, Peggie, don't you?"

Margaret wheeled round on him, but she wouldn't meet Jim's unhappy eyes, nor look into his face, out of which a good deal of the ruddy color had faded. "I'm very glad to hear you've sold a picture," she said coolly. The polite indif-

ference of her tone sent a shiver over Jim; suddenly he felt as if he were the merest acquaintance to her instead of — "I hope you will sell many more," went on Margaret frigidly. "Some other time when I am at home I'll hear the particulars, but not to-night. I haven't time." Then she whirled herself into the next room, where Nemesis awaited her in the shape of Ursula.

"Margaret Jeffrey, you knew that man was coming — you invited him!" was Ursula's accusation. "You have slighted Jim the whole evening, and now to finish up with *this!* I'm astonished at you!" She expected, hoped for, a contradiction; the more indignant it might be, the better pleased would she be to receive it.

But for a while Margaret maintained silence and an appearance of indifference, though the hands that held her hat pins were cold and trembling so as to be almost useless, and the face beneath the hat was alternately paling and flushing in a nervous, very unusual fashion. "I did know Mr. Austin was coming," she said presently, deliberately, her eyes, full of defiance, meeting Ursula's in the old dressing-glass before which they both stood. "And as for Jim Ivors, I'm not bound to devote myself to his entertainment *every* time I come home. If I come home, he's here. If I'm out in the square for a breath of fresh air, there he is. If I look out of the window the last thing at night, nine times out of ten there's Jim sitting on a bench smoking like a furnace, or else tramping up and down the park. He

actually haunts me!" Margaret's tone had lost its deliberation now. "And I'm just sick of it — sick of *him!*"

"Margaret! what a way to speak of the man you're going to marry!" exclaimed Ursula, her anger lost in consternation. Then, involuntarily, "And that you should be so disagreeable this evening of all others, when the poor fellow has the sale of his picture to tell you of; when he has spent more than he can afford to on that antique table you were wild about, just to please you" —

Margaret turned upon her sister in a sudden fury. "I never said I'd marry Jim Ivors," she declared vehemently. "And I never will! If he has chosen to take that unwarranted idea into his stupid head, am I to be held responsible for it, and harangued and scolded if I'm barely civil to another — to other men? I won't stand it! You're all acting as if I had committed a crime in letting Mr. Austin call here. I did n't invite him at all; he *asked* to be allowed to call." There was triumph in Margaret's voice now as well as indignation. "He said he wanted to meet — my relatives."

"My dear, does Miss Austin know of her brother's visit here this evening?" asked Mrs. Jeffrey's quiet voice. She had entered the room unobserved by the girls, and her serious, troubled eyes touched Margaret.

"I — I don't know, mother," she hesitated; then, honestly, with a deep blush called up by mingled shame and pride, "No, I don't think she does.

But surely Mr. Austin is old enough to make a call without having to ask his sister's permission!" The next minute Margaret's arms were around Mrs. Jeffrey's neck, her face buried in that lady's shoulder. "Oh, mother, don't look at me so reproachfully!" she cried out. "It surely is n't such a dreadful thing for Mr. Austin to call here! He may be rich and important, and we poor and obliged to earn our living, but we are refined people. I am just as well born as he is, and he knows it. If he wants to come to see us and be our friend, why should n't he? He is a true gentleman, mother; *I know* you would like him." Then Margaret straightened up. "And as for Jim Iv— "

"That is just why I *do* object to visits from Mr. Austin," interrupted Mrs. Jeffrey gently but firmly, and with a movement of the head not unlike that of her daughter. "You know, Margaret, *noblesse oblige;* it is an obligation upon one who is noble to act nobly. You are in Washington Square to be Miss Austin's companion; not to be receiving attentions from her brother, unknown to her. If Mr. Austin is so honorable a man, then he has not come here this evening in the expectation of escorting you home without some encouragement from you to do so. Child, dear daughter" — Mrs. Jeffrey grew very earnest — "I should be grieved and disappointed, more than I can bear to even think of, if you allowed any attentions from Mr. Austin save of the most everyday, conventional nature — such as you *know* to be your

due from him as his sister's companion. Marnie, my firstborn, you 're a woman now. I can't insist on your behavior; I can only tell you how I feel about this matter — only advise, and leave the following of the advice to your own heart. I love you, dear, I admire you, and I trust you!"

With a quick passionate gesture Margaret caught her mother's face between her own two hands and kissed it warmly. "Darling mother, don't worry about me! I shall remember, and I 'll do my best to act as you 'd like me to!" she cried, with deep feeling. All softness was gone from her voice, though, when she turned and spoke to Ursula; instead there was a sharpness not usual to Margaret with her favorite sister. "But you need n't, from what I said to mother, think that I 'm going to marry Jim Ivors," she declared. "You think him a paragon; I don't. Jim has *some* good qualities — 't would have to be a poor wretch indeed that would be perfectly destitute of them; but he is the most untidy, slovenly, stupid" — she seemed to find satisfaction in piling up her adjectives — "clumsy, uncouth creature I 've ever known! I would n't, I *could n't* endure having him around me all the rest of my life!"

"You can say this, after all the years of patient, faithful love he has given you!" exclaimed Ursula incredulously.

"You think that 'll work on my feelings, don't you? But it does n't — not one atom," returned Margaret, and forthwith marched off to the drawing-room, where stood the three men in their over-

coats, all ready to take their departure. As Margaret entered the room, uncle Gabriel appeared through another door, and he also wore his overcoat, a long-skirted affair that hung on his small, spare figure and flapped around his heels. The black skullcap was gone, soon to be replaced by the stiff derby hat which the reverend gentleman held in his hand.

"Well, my dear, ready?" he asked cheerfully.

Margaret started, Jim's brow cleared as if by magic, and Mr. Austin lifted his eyebrows in polite surprise.

"*I* expected to be Miss Jeffrey's escort to Washington Square," he said.

"Oh, that is my privilege, which I am not at all inclined to forego," was Mr. Kincaid's jaunty answer. "Come along, Margaret. We 'll let these good gentlemen get well ahead of us; then you and I can walk slowly and have our usual gossip together by the way."

But a little later that same evening, before Ursula had finished "straightening" the drawing-room and putting out the lamps, there came a hasty scrabble at the door.

It was Jim Ivors back again.

"No, thank you, I won't come in," he remarked hurriedly, in reply to Ursula's invitation; "I only came back for a few words. Say, Ursa" — Jim's whisper grew most persuasive — "don't you let anybody be cross with Peggie for — for this affair to-night — will you? Peggie 's a handsome girl.

She can't help people admiring her, can she? You see, it might n't have been through any doing of hers at all that that Austin fellow was here to-night. I should 've thought of this before, but I 'm such a jealous cur where she 's concerned. Now don't let anybody blame her — d' you understand? "

CHAPTER IV

DRESS REHEARSAL

"URSULA, it 's come! And mother promises we shall divide them this evening — right after tea," announced Frances in an excited stage whisper over the banisters, as her sister came lagging up the last flight of steps.

Ursula leaned against the wall and looked up at her. "'It'?" she said interrogatively. "And what is the mysterious 'them' that we are to rend apart after tea?"

"Oh, you are so dense sometimes!" Frances threw out her hand impatiently. "I did n't want everybody in the house to hear, but as you can't guess I suppose you must be told." Dropping her voice to the merest whisper she added: "The Greenoughs have sent a bundle, a huge one. It came by express, and it 's so big and round and fat and 'comfy' looking" — Frances was fond of adjectives — "that we feel sure there are lots of pretty things inside it. Is n't that jolly? And was n't it lovely of the G.'s?"

"Very," answered Ursula, but with such lack of enthusiasm as immediately to attract the younger sister's attention.

"What 's the matter? Something 's gone wrong at the office," asserted Frances. "Tell me."

"Oh, only that my story for this week has been cut and cut until there 's hardly anything of it left." Ursula's pretense of indifference did not at all deceive the "youngest," as Frances was called in the family, and was soon dropped. "It 's the fourth in the series, you know," continued Ursula, "and I think the best. The character drawing is stronger. And now, to make the story fit into a certain space in the paper, it has been so cut and pared that it reads just like the barest, baldest statement of a most ordinary happening. There 's no life in it. Those stories come from my very heart" — a little tremor shook her voice; "there is n't one superfluous word in them, and yet this is the second one that has been mutilated. Shows how much the office people appreciate my best work! Mr. Rose was away to-day, or I should have asked him to use his influence for my poor little story. It 's so discouraging! I feel now as if I would n't write another line. Oh well," returning to indifference, "I suppose it 'll be like this always; no use in moaning over what can't be helped. I must just get calloused to it!" Determined that the tears which had sprung to her eyes should not be suspected, Ursula finished abruptly, and made a dash for the front door.

But Frances's long arms came suddenly in the way, and held and hugged her vigorously. "You dear old tired clever thing!" the "youngest" declared; then giving by love's intuition the comfort most sustaining: "No, it *won't* always be like this. You 'll be famous yet, and able to take

all the space you please — see if you 're not — when you finish your novel and the public read it. So don't you mind what those horrid, narrow-minded old office people do. *Then* they 'll be glad enough to give you the whole paper, if you wanted that much space. Cheer up, Ursa; your turn will come. I predict it. You are going," with most emphatic wag after wag of her head, "to be a great — famous — writer. Now! And you know lots of things that I predict come true."

"And lots of them do not. You 're a goose!" ungratefully returned Ursula; but she laughed, the cloud lifting from her face, and that satisfied Frances.

"Come on in and see the bundle," she urged, leading the way to the dining-room, where, in one corner, stood a package of truly generous proportions. It was covered with stout paper wrappings, and to the Jeffreys, who had an intimate knowledge of former bundles, suggested all manner of pleasant as well as practical surprises.

"That *is* a bouncer!" agreed Ursula, eyeing the big brown package with reviving interest.

"We 're to open it just as soon as tea is over and everything in order again. You know this is Gretchen's afternoon out," remarked Ruth, as she set a plate of crisp, freshly buttered toast on the table. The toastmaker's cheeks and dainty little ears were a deep soft pink; she wore a white apron tied pinafore fashion around her neck, and there was a pleasant excitement shining in her

quiet gray eyes. It was in her slow voice, too, as she said persuasively: "Get off your things at once, won't you, Ursa? And, Frances, go tell uncle Gabe that tea is ready. Bring him along with you, or he 'll forget all about eating, and go on writing, as he did the other evening. He 's been holding a reception the whole afternoon out in the hall — that Jared Watkins and a small crowd of Italians."

"As usual, they were hungry. They 've eaten up all the stale bread mother was saving for a bread-and-butter pudding," put in Judith, who, just returned from an all-day tramp among her "poor people," lay resting at full length on the lounge. "They 'd have got that as well," motioning to the plateful of toast, "had n't Ruth grown desperate and hidden it. Uncle Gabe has been entertaining, cheering, advising, and encouraging his 'constituents,' as Frances calls them, all the afternoon, and now, probably, he 'll sit up half the night writing editorials for their two papers. Uncle Gabriel is of the salt of the earth — we appreciate that; but," rearing her head uncomfortably to glance at the family, "what would become of the dear blessed man, I ask, without us to protect him from his own generosity?"

The girls laughed, and then Ruth urged: "Oh, *do* hurry, girls! The sooner we 're through with tea, the sooner to get at the bundle."

"Why such haste? Anticipation is sweet, and our high hopes may be dashed" — plaintively began Judith.

"Why, Judith, you know there 's *always* something good in the bundles," interrupted Ruth literally.

"Too bad Marnie can't be here," remarked Ursula; "she was for the last lot."

"Now, girls, don't keep tea waiting," came in the mother's even tones as she entered the room, bringing Judith to her feet, sending Ursula to take off her coat and hat, and speeding Frances to the small hall bedroom next the drawing-room, which her uncle occupied.

Sliding the portière aside she looked in. "Your rivirence," she said, dropping a curtsy, "I am 'sweet Anne Page,' and 'my *mother* desires your worship's company' in the dining-room; or in the words of Bailey junior, 'The wittles is up;' in plain everyday English, tea is ready."

Mr. Kincaid sat at a little table directly under the gaslight, and so absorbed in his writing that he glanced at his niece with blank, uncomprehending eyes. "Yes," he remarked, pulling absently at his beard. "Ah — true — we have not had tea. Well — eh," looking down at his work, and dipping his pen afresh into the ink, "I don't care for any tea to-night, my dear. I must get these finished."

But Frances pounced upon the little gentleman and turned his face up to the light. "Uncle Gabe, you are *bad!*" she asserted solemnly, with sudden suspicion. "You look tired to death. You did n't come home to lunch, and I 'll wager you have n't tasted *one* mouthful since early this morning!"

Uncle Gabriel released his face from his niece's hold, sat back in his chair, and slipping his hands into his pockets rattled his keys; a twinkle was in his eyes. "Now that's where you make a mistake," he said jauntily. "I not only lunched myself, but a friend as well, with me. Now there, my lady!"

"On ten cents!" cried Frances incredulously. "That was all you had in your pocket this morning. You told me so."

"On ten cents," repeated Mr. Kincaid, wagging his head, bubbling over with enjoyment of his niece's mystification. "I walked down town and up again — felt like doing it — so I still had my ten cents when I met Jared Watkins. Poor fellow!"— uncle Gabriel's bright face clouded for a moment — "he is certainly very unfortunate — very unfortunate! He had had no lunch, neither had I; so we went off together and refreshed the inner man on my ten cents. 'T was good, too, I tell you!" with a reminiscent smack of the lips.

"What did you get?" asked Frances, with interest, forgetting all about the waiting tea, and lounging comfortably against her uncle's door.

"Ha, ha! takes me!" laughed Mr. Kincaid, threading his beard with great satisfaction. "There are such public conveniences as lunch wagons," he went on to explain, "places where succulent morsels may be obtained at a very moderate price indeed. The 'Magnet' — good name, eh, *fetching* name — ha, ha! — has a most attractive bill of fare hanging outside, from which one may make his choice. Things to make your mouth water!"

— another reminiscent smack. "A darky has charge — clean, good fellow, always most respectful and attentive. My dime" — uncle Gabriel sat up and waved a lean forefinger at Frances — "allowed us to partake — sparingly, 't is true — of that delicious dish beloved by the discriminating Mr. Silas Wegg, 'a weal an' 'ammer.' In other words, Jared and I had each a veal and ham pie, at five cents apiece. Ha, ha!"

"Must have been about one mouthful for each. As long as you were doing it, why did n't you give the big creature the whole ten cents, and you come home to lunch?" queried Judith, who, sent in search of Frances, had come up in time to hear the story.

Uncle Gabriel's face fell. "I *never* thought of that!" he exclaimed, looking so thoroughly ashamed of himself that the girls had to laugh. "And poor Jared said he had n't had breakfast. What *was* I thinking of? And yet," rallying, as a sudden recollection occurred to him, "I had mentioned when we first met that I too was hungry, moved by that common impulse which stirs us all at certain hours of the day. He knew I was hungry, and he knew that I had only ten cents — inadvertently I had mentioned both facts; so to have offered him two pies, and taken none myself, would have been to have made Jared most uncomfortable, under the circumstances — see? My dears, the poor have very delicate feelings, very. One has always to consider that in — eh — offering any assistance. If I 'd had my wits about me,

I need n't have volunteered the information that I was hungry, or the low state of my finances. As long as I did, however, 't was best that we ate together. Jared's feelings would have been hurt else, I know they would."

"Well, well! if you are n't the most inconsiderate people!" declared Ruth, appearing on the scene. "Frances sent for uncle Gabe, Judith for Frances, and now mother had to send me after you all."

"To be sure!" cried Frances, making a plunge for her uncle's arm, and turning out the gas at the same moment. "Come on, your rivirence; be spry!"

Uncle Gabriel fell into his favorite's mood, and the two went headlong, helter-skelter, through the dimly lighted rooms, arriving in the dining-room ahead of Judith and Ruth, and demanding loudly, in a most injured tone, "Why, I thought you were waiting for us! Where are the others?"

Usually tea was a slow meal with the Jeffreys: adventures and incidents of the day were related and talked over, letters were read aloud, books and newspapers discussed, and often plans formulated for the morrow. It was a meal beloved of the family and looked forward to. But to-night there was not the customary lingering around the table. Instead was a briskness and celerity about every one's movements that excited Mr. Kincaid's curiosity, until Ursula showed him the portly brown bundle in the corner of the room.

"Ah," he remarked, peering at it, "that ac-

counts for everything. *Vanitas vanitatum* — well, I suppose young people must frivol a little. 'T is n't likely there 's anything for me in the bundle, and those editorials are waiting. I 'll go write them." And forthwith the little gentleman trotted off to his quiet room and his work.

"There, now all is finished," Ruth said, putting the last tumbler on the sideboard, and giving the table cover a little straightening twitch. "Now, mother, we 're all ready."

"Yes, everybody 's ready," chimed in Frances. "Mother, sit in this low chair, and we 'll drag the bundle before you."

With a smile Mrs. Jeffrey took the seat appointed her, and in a trice the big package was before her and the strings cut. A long-drawn "O-o-h!" broke from the four girls as the stout wrappings were pulled aside, disclosing a pile of neatly folded, many-colored garments.

Mrs. Jeffrey looked across the heap at the four eager faces opposite her. "Years ago," she said, "I gave your cousin Esther a dress. 'T was a new yellow silk — I 'd never worn it — with a pattern of little flowers all over it. How pretty she looked in it, too! She has never forgotten that gift, and now in our time of need see how the small kindness comes back to us in double and triple measure! Esther is a dear, generous creature!" There was a suspicious moisture in Mrs. Jeffrey's eyes.

"That 's the kind of memory worth cultivating," quoth Judith absently, eyeing the garments with deep interest — "short where injuries are

concerned, but like an elephant for kindnesses. Oh, mother*ee!* what a swell gown! Who 'll get that, I wonder? I 'm just pining for a tailor-made suit" —

"Goodness! I hope we won't all want the same thing!" cried Ruth anxiously.

"We can do as we 've done before — let mother decide," remarked Ursula.

"They 're marked — they 're all marked —which is for whom," broke out Frances, whose sharp eyes had been at work. "And there 's a gorgeous bit over there with *my* name on it. *Hur*-rah!" Catching Ruth, who happened to be nearest, by the waist, the "youngest" whirled her round the big table and back before any resistance could be offered.

"You are entirely too rough!" exclaimed Ruth, breathless and indignant; but Frances paid no heed, for with a squeal of delight she had seized upon the garment Mrs. Jeffrey held out. "Girls, girls, it 's a tea-gown! — with a *train!*" she screamed, dancing about with delight, the new possession clasped in her arms. "I must put it on right away. I 've never worn a train." But in the very act of flight she paused. "Think I 'll wait, and see first what everybody else gets," she announced, to deaf ears, for the girls were too deeply interested inspecting the garments the mother was handing out to pay any attention to each other's remarks.

Exclamations of delight filled the air. "This *is* a beautiful bundle! Silk linings galore! Gaze!"

cried Judith, displaying the gay lining of a skirt; she had carried off her spoil to a chair in a corner of the room, and was taking all a proprietor's pride in her new clothes.

"Oh, see this pink silk waist: is n't it *sweet?*" demanded Ruth ecstatically, holding the garment high in the air for inspection. "Cousin Esther remembered my weakness for pink; is n't that nice of her? And look at the lace on it!"

"Yes, and the yellow for Marnie — her favorite color," Ursula was saying. "And think of my getting this lovely tailor-made skirt and jacket — just what I wanted. See how fine the cloth is, and the whole thing so stunning. Do you mind my having it, Judy?"

Judith met the deprecating eyes without a minute's hesitation. "No, I 'm glad you got it," she said stoutly, "though, honestly, I might have minded had we divided the things ourselves — had n't they been marked for us, I mean. But I don't care one bit, Ursa, truly. I 've fared splendidly! And," eagerly, "I 've settled in my mind just who of my poor people are to have this — and this" — pointing out two of the newly acquired acquisitions to her wardrobe, "when I 've finished with them. I 'll wear them carefully."

"Mother, dear, what did you get? Oh, were you forgotten?" cried Ursula, with sudden compunction. "Take my suit. It could easily be altered to fit you" —

"Would cousin Esther forget me?" laughed Mrs. Jeffrey; then laying her hand on a small

heap near her chair, "No, my dears, I am very well off: all these are mine."

"I'm going to put on my tea-gown," declared Frances. "Come, Ursa, help me. Oh, I've thought of something! Excuse me, mother." She ran whispering from one to another of her sisters, and presently the whole four picked up their new treasures and filed out of the room, with the assurance, "We'll soon be back, mother — very soon."

The running to and fro, the laughter and snatches of gay talk that came floating out to the dining-room, told Mrs. Jeffrey that some fun was afoot, and with a smile she awaited it.

She had not very long to wait. Along the hall and into the room they came, with bows and smiles and mincing steps and infectious little gusts of giggles. The things in the bundle marked "odds and ends" had been well utilized.

"This is a fancy-dress party, mum," Mrs. Jeffrey was informed by the foremost one, who was Ursula, in a low-necked waist, with a mousseline-de-soie scarf half covering her pretty shoulders and round white arms. She wore a feather in her hair (taken from a summer hat) and long gloves. Ruth came next, wonderfully fair to look at, clothed in something that was soft and shimmering, pink as its wearer's exquisite color, and giving her such an air of statuesque repose as made the mother suddenly realize that one, at least, of her "twins" was very much "grown up." But Judith and Frances were the most picturesque of the

group, the former in a yellow and red Dolly Varden watteau gown which had been long in the family; it was looped high over a yellow cretonne petticoat, and with the high-pointed bodice and elbow sleeves lent an old-time effect which was very becoming to Judith. Finding Frances unwilling to forego the wearing of the tea-gown, the girls had draped it round the slim figure as nearly after the fashion of the Dolly Varden costume as could be obtained; of course leaving the train, which just then was its owner's proud delight. Both girls wore their hair powdered, and a rose (another contribution from the summer hat) nestling above the left ear. With her whitened locks piled high on top her head and heightening the brilliancy of her eyes, craning her slender girlish throat from among the falls of lace that finished the neck of the pale green tea-gown, and flourishing her long arms to show off the wide, open, lace-trimmed sleeves, Frances looked a very different creature from the shabby overgrown young person she generally represented.

While the other girls carried on elegant and animated conversations with Mrs. Jeffrey and imaginary and admiring cavaliers, Frances retired to the open space by the west window and gave herself up to the practicing of the most profound and elaborate curtsies, directed to no one in particular, and varied by occasional rushings to and fro — filled with admiration of the long train that came switching and twisting after her. "This is beautiful! I do think those Greenoughs are

dears!" she exclaimed ecstatically, returning from one of these sudden excursions. "If I ever get so well off that I don't have to wear out my clothes myself, I'll certainly hunt up some nice refined poor people — like ourselves — and get them to accept my things, and" —

"Could there possibly be another family of young females quite so nice as ourselves?" queried Judith slyly.

"Judy, how can you be so conceited!" exclaimed Ruth, and was astonished and not overpleased at the shouts of laughter that arose.

"Come, let's go and show ourselves to uncle Gabe," hastily proposed Ursula. "He is probably so engrossed with those editorials as to have forgotten our very existence. We'll give him a surprise."

And in this they succeeded, for no one could have looked more astonished than did Mr. Kincaid as the four pretty creatures marched into the room.

"Why, why! dear me! what is all this?" he exclaimed, dropping his pen and sitting back in his chair to look at them.

"We're not your busy-bee nieces at all, sir," Judith informed him, with a very grand air. "We are four fairy princesses from across the sea, just stepped in to dazzle your eyes. We can't stay but a little while, for of course there are four fairy princes in full pursuit of us. And should they ever catch us — ugh!" — here was a gesture of exaggerated horror — "we'd have to marry them

and go off to be queens of fairyland. Then neither you nor other mortal would ever lay eyes on us again!" She finished in a tone of deep commiseration for those who would be so deprived.

Uncle Gabriel stroked his beard and looked at his nieces, a couple of whom bridled and tittered behind their hands; then he arose and made them a profound bow. "I 've always felt a great desire to meet some fairies," he said, with twinkling eyes. "But I 'd no idea they were such substantial creatures. How did your royal highnesses come — by air line, or in some 'dusky barge'? Girls," dropping suddenly into enthusiasm, "you 're all so handsome that I 'm filled with admiration! Ruth, you 're a model for a duchess. Judy, you 're a dream of beauty. Ursula, you look sweet enough to kiss" — suiting the action to the word. "Frances" —

"Oh *dear!* there 's that front door bell!" interrupted the "youngest" impatiently. "It 's that horrid Gretchen — she said she 'd be in early. Keep my compliment until I get back, uncle Gabe, and don't forget to say something about my new train. I 'll go to the door, mother," she shouted through the rooms; then wheeling round to face her sisters, a giggle on her lips, "Girls, I 'll let Gretchen in through the sitting-room door," she said rapidly. "You all come out here first, and sit round like company. It 'll be a joke to see her round eyes open."

While the sisters, with only half-suppressed laughter, were hastily taking their places in the

little drawing-room, Frances unlocked the front door and thrust out her powdered head, waving a bare slim arm, from which the open sleeve of the green tea-gown had fallen away. "You may come in this way, Gretchen," she called authoritatively.

But the next minute she fell back, with a little shriek, and three young men filed into the room.

"Hallo! what 's up — a masquerade?" asked one, Jim Ivors, staring with all his eyes at the three girls who had taken "poses" for Gretchen's benefit. "Where 's your mother? I 've brought you a new cousin. Here he is — Basil Fabrey." Jim motioned to the young fellow who stood beside him.

For one dreadful moment it seemed as if the girls were dumb. Then Judith called, with a note that was almost anguish in her voice, "Uncle Gabriel, please come here at once!" And springing up, Ursula held out her hand to the tall round-shouldered man who was lingering by the door, looking shy and most uncomfortable.

"Ah, Mr. Rose!" she exclaimed cordially, though her cheeks were scarlet with embarrassment. "I am very glad to see you. This is my uncle, the Reverend Mr. Kincaid. These are my sisters. Judith, Ruth, Frances, this is Mr. Rose, of whose kindness to me you have often heard. Frances," turning to that young person, "ask mother" —

But the powdered head and brilliant eyes, which had been thrown into bold relief by the heavy

dark portières among whose folds their owner had tried to lose herself, had suddenly disappeared. Though called "slow" and "dense" by some members of his family, Jack Rose had nevertheless found time, during Ursula's hurried introduction, to wonder to which of the sisters that head might belong. And now his gray eyes turned upon his hostess with so unmistakable a question in them that she answered it before he spoke.

"That was Frances," she said, smiling; "our 'youngest,' and a most merry, impetuous, and erratic individual. She is responsible for your finding us in this crazy rig. We 'dressed up,' as the children say, for fun — and have been caught! Jim, have you introduced Mr. Rose to our new cousin?"

CHAPTER V

THE NEW COUSIN

THROUGH the rooms swept Frances, like a small tornado, in such agitation of mind as to have entirely forgotten the long train of her tea-gown, but lately her dearest pride, which now went gliding and switching after her quite unheeded.

"Mother! what do you suppose? 'T was n't Gretchen at all!" she cried, bouncing into the dining-room in great excitement. "Jim 's in there, and Mr. Rose, and — a *new cousin!*"

"What do you mean? What are you talking about?" demanded Mrs. Jeffrey, in bewilderment.

"That is what Jim said, that 's all I know — 'a new cousin,'" insisted Frances. "And," turning up her saucy little nose, "he is n't much 'for pretty,' either, as Jim would say. I only got one good sight of him, but that was enough. He 's got a *lo-ong* face, long as a horse's (it looks so, anyway), a mouth to make a gargoyle envious, and the queerest eyes you ever saw. They 're enough like Miss Weewee's for him to be *her* cousin, instead of ours. And, to crown all, his name is Basil Fabrey. Such a name! Miss Weewee Jeffrey, allow me to present to you — Mr. Bazzle-Dazzle Fabrey!" Laying violent hands upon the astonished cat, Frances set her upon her

hind legs, and forced poor pussy to make a low bow to the absent cousin.

"Fabrey! Fabrey!" repeated Mrs. Jeffrey thoughtfully, searching her memory. "Where *does* he come in? Oh, I know," brightening up; "Cousin Maria Norton married a Fabrey, and went to live on the Pacific coast. He didn't amount to much in a business way, either. This must be her son. Well, well, I never expected to hear of Maria again! We used to be girls together. I'll go right in. Come, Francie."

All embarrassment was gone, and quite a buzz of conversation had taken its place, when Mrs. Jeffrey entered the little drawing-room. With a merriment she had been far from feeling at the time, Ursula was relating her difficulties of the day to Jack Rose, and receiving his sympathy, while, in a corner, Jim was hearing from Ruth of Margaret's latest visit at home, and telling his own tale of woe.

"She has n't written me one line for the last three weeks, and I 've sent her letter after letter," he said mournfully. "And I 've laid eyes on her but twice, though I 've been in Washington Square — well, pretty often" (poor Jim!), "and then she didn't notice me. It seems to me that she could n't help seeing me; but still, of course, she might n't have seen me — she could n't have. I 've no wish to force myself on Margaret, you understand," with an effort after his pride, "but she belongs to me, Ruth; you all know that. And I 'll never give her up unless she herself asks her

freedom from me. But she 'll not do that." Jim's tone grew confident, his face brighter. "Peggie is true to the core. There is some good reason for her acting in this way — I 'm sure of it — and she 'll explain everything by and by. I 'm not afraid she 'll ever go back on me; she 's too loyal for that sort of thing."

"Did Marnie ever tell you in so many words that she 'd marry you?" asked Ruth, in her direct way.

For a moment Jim looked at her with startled eyes. "I — I — don't remember that she did — in so many words," he replied presently, very slowly. "But she knows — has known for years — that I love her, that I 'm working for her; that I expect her, and no other woman, to be my wife. She 's helped me choose the things for our home by and by; she 's never once said that she would n't or did n't wish to marry me. What am I saying?" Jim pulled himself up short. "'T was n't ever necessary to discuss that question between us," he said, with an assumption of dignity so unusual as to rather overawe Rufie. "And I won't discuss it now. I trust Margaret. You understand, Ruth? I trust her entirely."

Meanwhile, after a few cordial words to Jack Rose, Mrs. Jeffrey was making acquaintance with the new cousin, whom it had fallen to Mr. Kincaid's and Judith's share to entertain. Basil Fabrey was not very unlike Francie's description of him. His jaw was much too long for beauty, and his mouth decidedly wide, the lips set firmly

together. Constant outdoor life had tanned his naturally fair skin almost to copper color; his hair, too, was very dark, if not black, and the contrast to these presented by a pair of very light blue eyes was a striking and not entirely pleasing one. Sharp eyes they were, too, and holding between the brows a little scowl that came and went and came again as their owner talked. Very unlike handsome Jim Ivors was he, or Jack Rose, with his intellectual, noble face that reflected the soul within; and yet, not altogether ill-looking either was this young man. His smile, though slow to come, was very pleasant while it lasted, lighting up the sombre face wonderfully, and flashing into the watchful eyes. Basil was about twenty-three or four, tall, well developed, with a well-knit figure and good bearing, and dressed, this evening, in a rough brown business suit. The smile was having its own way now, as the new cousin stood responding to Mrs. Jeffrey's hand-clasp, and answering her words of welcome.

"I would know you were Maria's boy!" the good lady told him. "You have her smile. Now sit down here and tell me of your mother; I have n't heard a word from or of her, for years. She used to be full of fun! Is she so still, or has she grown old and staid like myself? And has she such bonny daughters as I have?"

Then Basil's smile flashed out again. "You *are* pretty well off," he said, sitting down beside her and letting his eyes rove about the room. The scowl had quite disappeared. "I 'm all the son

and daughter my mother 's got," he went on. "I 'm her only child. Should n't wonder if there 'd been times, though, when she found even that one a pretty big handful!" He seemed to regard this as a joke. "Mother has n't much fun about her these days," he told his hostess. "My father's death, about four years ago, was a great blow to her; seems as if she can't get over it. In one way mother 's had a hard life. The old man" — Basil hastily corrected himself — "my father was very unfortunate. For years he was" — He paused, as if hardly knowing how to go on.

"Yes, yes, I did hear," broke in kind-hearted Mrs. Jeffrey, anxious to spare him. "I heard of his investing, and losing every dollar; just after they were married, too. Yes, I heard of it. Poor Maria! Still, there are harder things than poverty in this world to endure. And," smiling, "your mother is fortunate in having such a strong young son to put his shoulder to the wheel for her."

The "strong young son," however, did not return the smile. He was studying his hostess's placid face with the most watchful eyes, that ugly scowl in full possession of his forehead.

"Then if you find a business opening in New York, you may stay on here," remarked Judith, rather in the tone of a statement than that of a question. She had returned from a short visit to the other side of the room in time to hear the last part of her mother's speech.

"Possibly," returned the young man briefly. Then to uncle Gabriel, who had just joined the

group, he added, "I suppose people in New York think an awful lot of money, as they do in California — as they do the whole world over. They value a man for what he 's got — how much he 's worth — not for what he is."

There was a sharpness, almost bitterness, in his voice which affected each of his listeners differently. "Poor boy! he has had his share of snubbing!" thought the mother, and remarked with genuine warmth of tone, "Well, riches or poverty, it 's the same to us. We are poor ourselves, and we value our friends for themselves, without the slightest regard for their possessions or social status."

"'The gold is but the guinea stamp, a man 's a man for a' that,'" quoted uncle Gabriel cheerily. "Still," he went on slowly, stroking his beard, "money — wealth — should never be despised. In the proper hands it may be a power for good."

"I just wish *I* had a lot of it," cried Judith, laughing. "I know what I 'd do with it — fast enough. I would" —

The new cousin's scowl was actually fierce, his pale eyes scintillated. "You 're just like the rest of 'em," he broke in rudely. "I never knew a girl yet that did n't love money! Well, I am poor — poor — poor! And those that don't like me may leave me alone!"

His vehemence surprised them all; and Judith's little head went up. "Judging by myself, I should say that girls preferred *manners* to money," she retorted, with such obvious meaning that the blood rushed to Basil's bronzed face, turning it a bright mahogany color.

"I — I did n't mean" — he began awkwardly.

But Judith was paying no attention to his remark. "Some one is knocking!" she exclaimed, and hastily opening the door, disclosed a small boy standing in the hall.

He was a little thin fellow, and so overcome by the sudden prominence into which he was brought that his tongue almost failed him. "I wan' — Miss Judit'," he stammered out, then began clawing his ragged cap nervously, and balancing himself on one foot, resting the other, in a dilapidated shoe, against his ankle, while his gaze fixed itself, open-eyed, on the girls in their fantastic dresses.

"Why, it 's Eddie West!" cried Judith. "I 'm Miss Judith — don't you know me? This is only flour," motioning to her whitened locks with a smile. "Go to the other door, Eddie," she went on kindly; "I 'll let you in there and hear your message."

There were two front doors to the Jeffreys' apartment: one from the public hall directly into the drawing-room, where the boy now stood. The other was the regular entrance, where was the bell, and opened into what was termed the "private hall," a narrow entry of which mention has already been made.

Opening this door, Judith admitted and led the way for Eddie into the dining-room, where besides her mother, uncle Gabriel, and Frances, was, to Judy's annoyance, the new cousin as well.

"Now, Eddie, what 's the message?" Judith asked.

Then the burden of grief, which for a few minutes had been lifted, settled down again upon nine-year-old Eddie. "Me mother — she 's orfle sick! She wan's Miss Judit' right off!" he managed to get out, then crooking his ragged elbow against the side of the door, broke into a fit of crying. But it was over almost as soon as begun, and the little chap straightened up, wiping his eyes and nose on a dingy rag which did duty for a handkerchief, and, furtively, on his coat sleeve. "I dunno what 's de matter," he replied to Judith's query. "She 's shakin' like she was col'; we ain't got no fire. An' she 's talkin' orfle funny — callin' all de time fur Miss Judit'."

"I 'll go right away," promised Judith. "Mother, have we any blankets, any old quilts, that I could take along?"

"Only one thin old comfortable — I 'm afraid that is all I have," Mrs. Jeffrey said doubtfully. "I gave away my last old blanket the other day."

"Oh, my dear, take a blanket or quilt — whichever it is — off my bed," urged uncle Gabriel; his skull-cap was half off his head, his eyes were shining with sympathy through his glasses. "I 'm sure I don't need so many covers. And besides, I could put my overcoat on the bed if I were cold. Eh? Take it!"

"I 've got it! I 've thought of something!" cried Frances, with an inspiration. "The Colonel is n't in use; he 'll be just the thing!" She disappeared, and was back again in a minute or two, bringing with her a very long and thick circular

cloak. It was of soft material, dark gray and black, a long pointed hood hung down the back, and it was fastened at the throat by a large clasp of German silver.

"We named him after that funny book, 'The Colonel's Opera Cloak,' he was so very like Colonel St. John's wonderful cloak," the "youngest" explained to Basil, who sat with his elbows on the table, his chin in his palms, saying nothing, but, as Frances afterwards asserted, "looking at us all as if we were some curious, strange animals, of a species hitherto unknown to him." "It's been in the family for ages," continued Francie, growing sentimental. "We 've every one of us worn it, at some time or other. We 've covered with it, we 've taken it on journeys. Good-by, dear old Colonel!" She hugged the cloak to her, then threw it beside the basket into which her mother was hastily packing food and such other things as she thought might be useful. Bottles were filled with hot water and well wrapped up, and Eddie was supplied with a package containing wood and coal, with which to start a fire.

"Now I 'll get on my things," announced Judith, when all this was accomplished.

"You are never going yourself!" remonstrated the new cousin, in an earnest undertone, coming quickly to her side. "Send the things by the boy, give him money," — Basil's hand went unconsciously toward his pocket, — "but don't you go out among such people — and at this time of night. It is n't safe nor right."

A mocking smile flitted over Judith's lips; she lifted her eyebrows disdainfully. "Don't trouble yourself about my safety," she remarked crisply. "I am well known in this part of the city, and as safe under little Eddie's protection as if escorted by a phalanx of police. Mother is going with me, she always does at night, not because she is afraid to trust me alone among my poor people, but because she is so capable in sickness." Then the young lady marched away with a grand air very suitable to her Dolly Varden gown and powdered hair.

But the dignity was still well in evidence when Judith returned in her simple street dress, and with the powder all brushed out. "Jim insists on going with us, mother," she said to Mrs. Jeffrey, who stood ready. "He insists on carrying the basket. He 'll go with us only to the door."

"I will carry the basket," asserted Basil, with rather a lordly air, and stretching out his hand for it.

But Judith drew it out of his reach. "You should have spoken sooner," she informed him indifferently.

"Why did n't you ask me? — we 're cousins," he retorted.

Again Judith arched her slender eyebrows at him; the color flamed into her pale face. "The men we know — cousins or not — ask permission to do things for us; they don't wait for *us* to ask them," she remarked proudly. "Here 's the basket, Jim. Come, Eddie."

"Look after the girls until I get back, Gabriel," Mrs. Jeffrey said, smiling at her brother. And then the rest of the family and the visitors crowded out into the hall to see the departure.

As the little party disappeared down the steps, Basil strolled back into the dining-room, and standing on the threshold of the door, hands in his pockets, closely scrutinized the cosy but shabby room. The inexpensive curtains, the patches in the rug, the faded cover of the broad old-fashioned lounge, the worn screen, even the gaping cracks in the flat-topped desk, which was sadly in want of "doing up" — nothing escaped his gaze. Slowly his eyes traveled over each object, and with a start fell upon Miss Weewee, who sat in her favorite place, in the middle of the table, regarding him with severe intentness. In her green eyes appeared what was known in the family as her "diabolical" expression, and so unpleasantly did it affect the new cousin that he snapped his fingers at her and cried "Scat!" with an emphasis that sent pussy flying behind the screen, from which place of refuge she peered out at him with fascinated interest.

"What are you doing?" asked Frances, appearing at Basil's elbow.

"Making acquaintance with your cat," was the somewhat grim reply. As they walked to the front room Basil added, "I should think you people 'd prefer a dog to a cat. There is something human about a dog. Does n't Judith like dogs?"

"Oh, yes, we all like them," replied Frances.

"We used to have dogs when we lived in the country, but here — in a flat" —

But not waiting for her to finish the sentence, Basil began asking other questions. It was not until some time afterward that the three girls realized how closely they had been catechised that evening, and how little the new cousin had told of himself in return. Jack Rose, however (who was lending but one ear to a long discourse of uncle Gabriel's), understood the process of "pumping" that was going on, and he was moved by an unusual and increasing resentment.

"And what do *you* do?" questioned Basil, with an air of affability, settling himself more comfortably in his chair. "I know about the other girls — now what 's your occupation?"

"I have none," replied Frances dolefully, and looking very much ashamed. "I 'm supposed to possess a voice, and it is being cultivated at my sisters' expense. I think I could sing, now — you know, fill a position in a church or somewhere, if I could get it. But Signor Bacalli insists I should wait a couple of years longer. I 'd like to be earning some money as well as the other girls, but I 'm the greatest dummy! I can't do a thing — unless," with a giggle, and casting a glance around the little drawing-room, — "unless it may be arranging a room, or setting a table. Those I can do very well — oh — well," holding up her powdered head, "pretty well. Can't I, Ruth?"

"Indeed, she can," confirmed Ruth warmly. "I 'm sure there is n't anybody in this city that has

more taste in fixing a house than Frances has. We often say that she 'd manage to make the very barest room look cosy."

"Anyway, Francie, with a voice like yours, you ought to be content," supplemented Ursula.

But Frances made a gesture of self-depreciation; and leaning forward, Jack Rose said, in the solemn fashion he had sometimes when very much in earnest, "The ability to make a home attractive is no mean gift, Miss Frances. My sister, Mrs. Erveng, considers it very valuable. Only the other day — and at other times, too — I heard her wishing for some one who, as she expressed it," — Jack smiled at the recollection of Betty's characteristic speech, — "would come in and change her furniture about every week, and dust her pretty china and things without reducing them to atoms."

"Oh!" exclaimed Frances, with a delighted little gasp, sitting up very straight and opening her brown eyes at Jack. "Perhaps I could" — She paused.

Jack opened his eyes, too. "That 's so — perhaps you could," he said, looking very much pleased. "I 'll speak to my sister. I think you 'll like her," he added. "She 's so bright and amusing and thoroughly nice!" A few minutes after, he rose to go. "You were very kind to let me come," he told Ursula, in what his sister Betty called his "old-fashioned manner." "I shall be glad to come again. And, sometime, may I bring my two younger brothers, Paul and Alan? We used to be a large family at home," he continued, "and

a jolly lot. But one after the other has married, until now there are only a few of us left at home, and at times it is dull for the boys." Ursula could barely keep from smiling at Jack's fatherly tone. "I should be glad to have the boys know you and your sisters. Paul is a clever fellow; he is in college — they both are. Thank you, I shall bring them very soon. Mr. Kincaid, you will see me at your office some afternoon;" the two editors had fraternized at once. "Good-night!"

But before Jack reached the stairs, Frances came running out into the hall. "Good-night, Mr. Rose," she called. "You won't forget, will you?"

With his hand on the banister Jack paused and looked at her, as she stood in the full glare of the gas. The light shone down on Francie's whitened mop of hair, showing its pretty waves and the tiny independent locks that sprung out here and there. It shone on the bright eyes uplifted to him, and on the mouth, parted in a half smile, the upper lip just short enough to show a glimpse of white teeth, and to impart a frank, very winning expression to its owner's face.

"Would n't Felix love to sketch her!" thought Jack, with a sudden appreciation of the girl's picturesqueness. "No," he said, smiling back at her, "I shan't forget. I 'll speak to Betty about it. Good-night!"

In the drawing-room, by and by, conversation lagged. Uncle Gabriel thought of his unfinished editorials with profound regret, and then surreptitiously took "forty winks" behind his glasses.

After an ineffectual struggle to keep her eyes open Ruth gave up, and retiring to the dining-room had a comfortable nap on the lounge there, while Ursula and Frances "racked their brains" to keep the ball of conversation rolling. The new cousin made no efforts in that direction; he simply sat on until Jim Ivors walked in, when he rose with alacrity, and an air of relief not at all flattering to his entertainers. "You 've been gone a good while," he remarked bluntly.

"Yes, I had to go for a doctor, the poor creature was pretty bad," explained Jim. "Your mother wishes you not to wait up for her and Judith," he said to the girls. "They 'll be home as soon as they can be spared."

Basil twisted his shoulders in a petulant childish way, and gave an impatient grunt. "Queer kind of work for a girl like Judith!" he declared. "Seems to me that in a big city like this she might 've found something else to do."

The sisters looked at one another in surprise, Jim cried sharply "Eh? — what 's that?" and uncle Gabriel's sleepy eyes flew open. "It is a noble work, sir — a noble work!" he said impressively, drawing up his little figure, and looking with disapproval at the newcomer.

Apparently entirely unaffected by this — with the most careless indifference, in fact — Basil made his adieux, and the young men went away together. But once in the street, Jim got the benefit of the new cousin's opinion, delivered in plain and unvarnished vernacular. "They 're the

derndest lot of softs I 've ever come across," he asserted. "Did you see that old duck flare up? I wonder if he thinks " —

Jim's hand fell heavily on his companion's shoulder. "Look here, young man," he said sternly, "just you say *one* more word derogatory to those people and I 'll knock you down. D' you understand? "

For a moment the two men looked into each other's eyes in silence, then Basil threw back his head and laughed, a laugh of genuine enjoyment. "By Jove — another of 'em!" he remarked facetiously. Then he frowned heavily and shook Jim's hand off. "I 've got a scheme in my head," he said brusquely, "and it depends entirely upon how you fall in with it whether I ever go to see my new relatives again. It 's this." Rapidly, and with insistence, he unfolded his plan, and Jim listened in silence, puffing away at his cigar.

There followed a short, sometimes sharp, discussion, in which, however, Basil won his point, for it ended by Jim saying, a little uneasily, a little moodily, "Well, I can't see any sense in your idea — but have your way. Only — I warn you! I 'll be keeping a close eye on all you do, and if you don't walk a chalk-line — just look out for yourself, that 's all. I 'll out with everything and spoil your little game. You understand? "

"Yes, I 'understand,' " mimicked the other, but laughingly. "And in the mean time just see that you keep mum. Good-night!"

"Good-night," answered Jim gruffly, and the two went their separate ways.

CHAPTER VI

LILIES OF THE FIELD AND OTHERS

More than once Margaret had told the family at home, "I don't feel my duties at the Austins' in the least irksome; in fact, I enjoy them. You know I love to read aloud; and Miss Austin is very nice and kind. Her letters and notes are usually so clever and amusing that it 's the most interesting work to write them off." She had thrown the girls into spasms of laughter with her descriptions of the daily drive — of the ceremonious procession of little frail Miss Austin to the carriage, escorted by a maid, by Margaret, and the pompous English butler, Huggins, who bore the extra wraps and the toy terrier, Carlo, with such condescending affability; of the fat coachman, who, Margaret said, reminded her of the rat that drove Cinderella's pumpkin coach, and of the rigidly erect footman who touched his hat with obsequious and automatic regularity, and then, when his mistress's eye was not on him, cast such adoring glances at her beautiful companion, — glances which, it is needless to say, that young person sternly ignored. The autocratic old housekeeper, too, who had held undisputed sway for years, who called the little mistress of the house

"Miss Marian," and both cuddled and tyrannized over her, she also was known to the Jeffreys through Margaret's saucy tongue.

"You would think she owned the whole place, and the family as well," Margaret had told them laughingly. "And she is the most jealous old thing! She watches and hovers around the room, and listens (yes, she does, I found her at it one day) when Miss Austin is talking to me, or dictating letters. I suppose she 's afraid 'Miss Marian' will like me too well, and so her long nose be put out of joint. I fancy Miss Austin is a little afraid of Emmons, — that 's the housekeeper's name, — but for all that she is very sweet and nice to me. Of course, I 'm kept pretty busy, but really I don't think I could have a pleasanter position — as long as I have to earn my own livelihood."

Margaret had said this in all sincerity, and the affectionate regard she felt for Miss Austin had not lessened as the weeks of her stay in Washington Square lengthened into months. Owing to the little lady's delicate health, she rarely went out of an evening, and when, this winter, Mr. Austin began returning early from his club, and finally got into a habit of spending many evenings at home, his sister was delighted. All her charm of conversation was exerted for the entertainment of this only and dearly loved brother — her junior by several years. Also in this cause Margaret's musical ability was called into requisition; and it was with pride and great satisfac-

tion that Miss Austin told an intimate friend, "Roger grows more and more fond of his home every day. I think I have reason to feel flattered when he gives up engagement after engagement, and even his club, to spend evenings at home with his little old-maid sister. Don't you?"

And Margaret, too, had come to enjoy those evenings when Mr. Austin stayed at home, when Felix Rose and his bright, gracious-mannered wife "dropped" in, or the Maxwell Derwents, or merry "quicksilver," — as Miss Austin called her, — Betty Erveng and her quiet husband. Among these kindly well-bred people Margaret was well treated; and in spite of a troublesome recollection or two, which would obtrude itself upon her conscience now and then, she had been, as she had stated to the family, very happy in her new occupation.

But there came one morning when Margaret awoke from sleep with a peculiar heaviness of the heart — a feeling of apprehension, almost — that surprised herself. "Why! — why should I feel so?" she said wonderingly, looking round the room for an explanation. Then her eyes fell upon a large gray envelope standing against her pincushion — there was always plenty of that heavy gray paper in the drawer of the library table downstairs. "Ah! the letter! I 'd forgotten it," Margaret whispered, and covering her face with her hands, gave herself up to very serious thought.

When presently the hands were removed, and

she sprang up to dress, her expression was calm and resolute. "There 's no comparison between the two — no comparison whatever," she declared emphatically, and began humming a tune by way of routing the last vestige of that disagreeable feeling. But it chanced to be a rollicking air that Jim Ivors was fond of whistling, and as soon as Margaret recognized this, the song died on her lips, and the rest of her toilet was performed in silence, but slowly, lingering over every detail.

Busying herself in one way and another, Margaret managed to be much upstairs that morning, until, from behind the curtains of her window, she saw Mr. Austin go across the park. "How distinguished he looks, and how well he carries himself!" she noticed, with a sudden proprietary pride that deepened the color in her cheeks, and rigidly keeping her eyes from the bench whereon, last night, had shone, far into the hours (she had jumped out of bed several times to see if it was still there), the small red glow of a cigar — or was it a pipe? "Some people have such low tastes!" thought Margaret, and turning from the window, went to Miss Austin, who always took a late breakfast and in her own sitting-room.

Having locked the letter in the gray envelope safely away, Margaret tried to put its contents entirely out of her mind, and give herself up to her duties. But, spite of all efforts, her thoughts would wander, and soon the absent, dreamy expression of the hazel eyes attracted Miss Austin's attention.

"Now, stop for a few minutes," the little lady said abruptly, interrupting the reading. "You sugared my cup of tea twice this morning. You gave Huggins the wrong message — I heard you. You poured out coffee instead of cream for Carlo. And you have read that last paragraph three times over, without in the least being aware of it. You 've got something on your mind, Margaret; that is very evident — something that, perhaps, is troubling you. Now what is it? Perhaps I could help. Tell me." Miss Austin's keen black eyes softened as they dwelt on the drooping face before her. She put out a hand and patted Margaret's shoulder. "Tell me," she repeated, with gentle insistence. "Perhaps it is a difficulty I could smooth out for you."

But the girl shrank from the friendly hand; suddenly, to her own great surprise, tears sprang into her eyes, and her underlip quivered. "Thank you — but there is nothing — to tell — now," she faltered.

"Perhaps you would like to spend the day with your mother," suggested Miss Austin kindly. "You have n't been home for some time. I 'll drop you there when we go out to drive."

Margaret looked more startled than pleased. "Oh, you 're very kind, but, Miss Austin, I don't want — I 'd rather not go home to-day," she said hurriedly. "I have that piece of 'drawn' work to finish — and the notes you have just dictated, to write. If — if instead of going to drive — I — might stay in — and work" —

Margaret had always admired Miss Austin; she had said at home that that lady's "bright black eyes and snow white hair, turned back over a cushion, give her the most striking appearance. She looks like a Marie Antoinette French marquise, or as I like better to think, a dear, kind, fairy godmother." But to the girl's disturbed fancy it seemed this morning that an unusual sternness had replaced the "kind, fairy godmother" expression. A recollection of that letter locked away upstairs came back to Margaret with a little shiver, and she could find no further words.

As it happened, however, Miss Austin's sternness was more than half in her companion's imagination. The little lady had an abhorrence of anything approaching to a "mystery," or any appearance of fear or awe in regard to herself; she also liked people to fall in with her plans and find them good. She was rather provoked with her young companion this morning, but not in the least seriously angry. "Oh, certainly you may stay at home, if you wish to do so," she returned brusquely. "I shall call for Gertrude Stuyvesant to drive with me. Now, continue the reading."

The routine of the day dragged almost interminably to Margaret, but at last Miss Austin started for her drive, the notes she had dictated were written and dispatched, and the young companion was free to take her sewing to her room and be alone.

Tossing the fancy work upon the bed, Margaret took out her interesting letter and read it slowly

and carefully — as she had read it again and again since its receipt of the evening before. "It is such a *nice* letter!" she told herself, giving the inanimate sheets lying in her lap a pat of approval. "Such a quiet, manly, sensible letter — not like those crazy effusions" — But she had no intention of letting her thoughts wander in *that* direction just then. "How surprised everybody will be!" A proud smile flashed over Margaret's face, sending up the corners of her lips, which had been drooping all the morning. She let her thoughts take their own course. "How strange it 'll seem to live here, as my own home; to be mistress here. Emmons will turn green with rage; but she need n't fear, I 'll never interfere as long as she treats me properly, as she 'll *have* to. I 'll have the girls here often — very often. I 'll introduce them into society — and marry them off well." She laughed. . . . "Rufie 'd be a stunning beauty, if she were dressed up as the girls are that come here. Ursa and Judith are stylish and clever — and by and by Francie's turn will come. Our 'youngest' is n't half bad-looking. I 'll look out for them. . . . What will Miss Austin say? I wish she knew. I wonder if she 'll be angry — just because I have n't money. I 'm as well born as any Austin!" Nevertheless Margaret shivered, and the corners of her mouth went down again. "And mother and the girls! Oh, *they* 'll be furious with me — for taking a man that any girl in her senses would almost give her eyes to get! My people have got the queerest,

most *absurd*, old-fashioned notions about some things! But they 'd like me to marry that — Jim — and go live — exist — it would n't be living — in a garret with him. That reminds me, it might as well be done now as at any other time."

With a very determined, in fact austere mien, Margaret went into the capacious closet of her room, unlocked the small shabby trunk which had brought her belongings to Washington Square, and came out again carrying a bundle of letters tied together with a blue ribbon. They were of all sizes and degrees of thickness — from a half page torn from a notebook to sheet upon sheet of foolscap — and all written in the same rapid, sprawling hand. How well Margaret knew the contents of each sprawl! This was asking Ursula and herself to go for a trolley ride and a walk in the fields one spring afternoon. The beauty of the budding trees, the Hudson lying broad and blue in the valley below, the hilarious spirits of the little party — how it all came back to her! Another was a gayly decorated, grandiloquently worded invitation for mother, uncle Gabriel, and the five girls to a "ball," to take place in the writer's studio. Carter Ferris and Ad Lambert — one a brother artist as impecunious as the host, the other a struggling newspaper man — had been the only other guests at the "ball." But what fun they all had had over the makeshifts for furniture and crockery — sitting on boxes and on barrels cut in two and covered with old rugs and draperies, and drinking chocolate, which they

themselves had made, out of glasses, tin cups, and even a shaving-mug. Each of the five ladies had been presented with a rich red rose. Margaret's was the finest, sweetest of them all; it lay pressed in the "ball" invitation, making a hard little hump in the envelope. That slip of twisted paper had come with a bunch of flowers on one of her birthdays — 't was just like the person who sent it to have no cards. This fat envelope held pages of protestations, glowing hopes — "Bah!" cried Margaret angrily, throwing out her hands as if in protest, "that one letter over there on my bureau is worth all these — the whole lot of them! Those demonstrative people tire one to death!"

Lifting the bundle gingerly by one of its loops of ribbon, she laid it in the empty grate, drew a match sharply, and set fire to the letters, after which she went and stared out of the window with unseeing eyes until the crackling and little roar in the grate had ceased. "Well; that 's done!" she said, with a sigh of relief, and, quite composed in manner, looking even cheerful, she went downstairs to meet Miss Austin, who had just returned from her drive.

About three o'clock of the same day Roger Austin was leisurely crossing one of the small parks in the neighborhood of the Jeffreys' home when a girl passed him, walking at a rapid pace. One of the things upon which Roger prided himself was that of never forgetting a face, and as this face belonged to some one with whom just

then he was most desirous of being friendly, he immediately turned, quickened his steps, and overtook the young lady.

"Miss Jeffrey, is it not?" he asked cordially. "I hope you have n't forgotten me — Roger Austin."

Very reluctantly Judith paused. "Oh, yes; Mr. Austin!" she exclaimed. She looked pale, there were tired circles under her eyes, and in the eyes themselves was an anxious, almost frightened expression. "I can't stop a minute even," she said hurriedly, moving on as she spoke. "We 're going over here to the church, to have this baby baptized — it is very ill."

Then Roger noticed that a girl of about thirteen walked close beside Judith, holding in her arms the smallest, thinnest infant that he had ever beheld. The girl, too, looked pale and frightened, and kept glancing nervously at the little face lying so ghastly white on her arm. The baby's eyes were closed, the small nostrils pinched; already some of the dignity and peace of death rested on its waxen features.

"This baby belongs to a family of nine children — they all and the parents live in *two* rooms," Judith whispered rapidly, as Mr. Austin, hardly realizing what he was doing, walked on beside her. "The father is a mechanic — earns good wages, but he drinks it all up. The mother — broken in health, discouraged — has lost all self-respect, and she also is a drunkard. She threw a fork at her four-year-old boy the other day, in a fit of

drunken frenzy. Think what a home — Heaven save the mark! — that must be for the children! Poor little baby! Life in that household means a hard, continuous struggle — it must be glad to slip away. How long it 's been ailing, I don't know. I met the girl, Netta, just now, hurrying across the park, on her way to the church. The mother, too intoxicated to come herself, was terrified to find the little creature dying, and, though she 's never shown the slightest interest in religion, in fact, refuses to hear anything of it, now she insists on the baby's being baptized at once. She told Netta to run every step of the way! Ah, here we are!"

Judith ended with a note of relief in her voice, as they reached the big brown church which stands for so much comfort and help — both spiritual and material — to those who come within its influence.

As Roger lifted his hat to leave her, with habitual politeness rather than any feeling of great interest excited by what he had just been told, he asked, "Can I do anything for you?"

"No, thank you," answered Judith. Then abruptly, eagerly, changing her mind, "Oh, yes, you can — you can come in and be the baby's godfather. There 'll be nobody else. Don't be alarmed," she added hastily, with a touch of bitterness, as she saw him start and his face change, "it will be a responsibility only of moments — the little thing is dying."

"Certainly I will do it," Roger said, obeying

a rare impulse, and following her into the dim, quiet church, where a young clergyman joined them.

Judith held the dying child, and, as one in a dream, Roger Austin stood beside her, and heard and repeated solemn, unaccustomed words which he had not thought of for years.

But it was as Judith had said — his responsibility was of short duration. On the way down the aisle, before the small party could reach the church vestibule, the baby's fluttering breath ceased, with one sharp little gasp, and the tiny form stiffened in death.

Then Roger beat an undisguisedly hasty retreat to the church steps, leaving Judith sitting in a pew with the small still body laid across her lap, and trying to hush the noisy grief of Netta, whose thin arms had been the little brother's only cradle, and whose long weak back even then ached as hard as did her heart.

After a while Judith came out alone, looking white and spent. "One of the deaconesses has taken the baby home," she told Roger very quietly. "She knows what to do. To-morrow I'll go to see the mother. Thank you for helping us."

"Give me the address, I'd like to send some flowers," Roger said, and made an entry in his notebook.

Then Judith held out her hand, with "Now I must say good-by."

"If you will allow me, we'll walk together. I am on my way to call upon your mother," Mr.

Austin remarked, smiling, glad to banish the tragedy just over in the pleasant recollection of a new happiness that was his.

"To see mother!" repeated Judith, in open-eyed surprise. "I'm sorry I can't go with you," she added, remembering her manners. "But I'm due in another direction, and," glancing at the clock overhead, "pretty soon, too, or I may be too late."

"Must you go?" he asked regretfully. He would have liked to tell her his errand, to secure her sympathy, but she appeared to be in a hurry, and it was against his nature to blurt out anything so important.

"Yes, I *must* go," declared Judith. "Good-by!" But scarce a step or two away, under the influence of a strong impulse, she turned and came back to Roger. "If I don't go," she said, — a confidential note in her voice that in some unwonted fashion immediately enlisted his interest, — "if I don't go, one of my boys will be sent to prison. All the boys in this neighborhood know me, and they know I like them. I call them 'my boys,' and I try, as far as lies in my power, to help them. I feel so *sorry* for the poor fellows! — sleeping, a good many of them, in the most wretched, foul homes; others, in areas and alley-ways; out of school hours living on the streets — often hungry — often cold and ragged. And with never a corner of their own, in all this great city, where they could have a good time — a romp or game — and forget the misery of their hard lives. There are these parks," —

Judith made a comprehensive sweep of her hand that included both, — "but with all the trees and the benches and fountains, there is no space for ball playing — and the boys would never be allowed to tramp over the grass. It 's all too prim and proper!"

"This boy I 'm going to see about to-day," went on Judith, "this Freddie Metz, is a pretty bad lot — up to all sorts of mischief and wickedness; active, sly, untruthful, and yet — no worse than one should expect from his parents, from his wretched, degrading environments. As uncle Gabriel says, 'Can you get grapes from thistles?'" Judy's voice grew husky; she stopped speaking, biting her underlip to keep it from trembling.

"It is hard on you to have to know of so much unhappiness," Roger remarked, in an attempt at sympathy.

"Not half so hard as for these poor people to endure it," cried Judith. "This is the way the accident happened: Freddie and some other boys — his 'gang,' he calls them — were playing ball in the street. Freddie's ball broke the glass window of a grocery store. To add to his iniquity," — Judith was smiling now, — "the young sinner put his arm through the hole, before it was discovered, and stole all the fruit he could lay hands on, which, with fine liberality, he divided equally between his friends and himself. Then the grocer appeared, the friends fled, Freddie was caught, and — so his little brother tells me (he was dispatched to implore my aid) — has been sent to the station-

house. Now if those boys had had a playground, — they *must* play, you know, it 's a necessity of life, — this would n't have happened, neither the accident nor the theft. See? "

Encouraged by the interest she saw in Roger's eyes, Judith went on, hurriedly, eagerly. "It could be done — it could be done," she cried. "If only somebody — some rich, good man — would buy up three or four or five tenement houses right in the thickest populated part of the East Side, where children swarm the streets to get a breath of fresh air and play. If he would buy the houses, then pull them down and turn the great open space into a playground for the children. Ah, if he would! Let it be open on *all* sides," Judith made a quick, wide sweep with her arms, the mere talking of her beloved scheme sent color into the pale cheeks, a hopeful ring into her voice, — "no fences, no gates — and with wide open spaces, where marbles and tops, football, tennis, — any, every game could be played — kites flown, races run — *every*thing! With a pump here and there — and great heaps of clean earth and sand standing about — where the children could roll in it, build forts, caves, make mud pies — enjoy themselves. Some trees, too, in one part of the playground, and grass, on which the youngsters could sit and lie and tumble somersaults if they wanted to. And a fountain, and some flowers — that they might be allowed to gather and take home, on certain days. There 's nothing wild or extravagant in that, is there? Is n't it all reasonable enough?

Oh, think of the evil ways, the mischief such a place would keep those poor children out of! Think of the good it would do their souls as well as their bodies!"

"The carrying out of such a scheme would require a great deal of money," Roger said calmly, reflectively.

The light and color faded from Judith's face. "Yes, I suppose it would," she returned wearily. "And for that reason, I suppose it will never be done. But, oh," with a tragic gesture and most wistful tone, "think of the crying need there is, in this great, rich New York, for such a place! You know, the benefit would be not only to the children, but to the city — the nation. For these boys and girls will be the next generation" — Again her voice failed.

Mr. Austin looked uncomfortable. "Let me, I beg of you, pay for the damage the boy did to the window," he urged, drawing a long leather wallet from his breast pocket. "Perhaps, then, the grocer might be induced to let the culprit off."

"No, no!" Judith's hands went out in protest, "that would never do. You are very kind, but that would n't do at all. I think perhaps the glass is insured, or partly so; it is generally, I am told. In that case the grocer's loss would not be very great. Perhaps he is sending Freddie to the station house — to prison — to frighten him and teach him a lesson. But prison — any measures of that sort — would, I am afraid, do this boy no good, just now. I 'm in hopes I shall get him off — I

am going to beg for him — on the condition of his promising solemnly to run errands for the grocer for so many hours every afternoon at so much an hour — we must fix on a price — until Master Freddie has *worked* out the expense of the accident. That would do the boy more good than any prison or reformatory discipline. Yes, perhaps the grocer will agree to it. He certainly will if he has been an East Side boy himself; he will appreciate poor Freddie's disadvantages. Good-by!"

Roger stood and watched the girl hurry across the park and get on a car, then his thoughts reverted once more to his own affairs. Since meeting Judith these had taken a secondary position, and now he found it required a little effort to readjust his mind on precisely its former basis. One of the speeches he had intended to make to Mrs. Jeffrey rather eluded his memory, and, though having no doubts whatever of the final outcome of his errand, still Roger always preferred to carry out a programme as planned. "I 'll stroll around the parks and quietly collect my thoughts, before going in," he decided, after a little deliberation.

"You are asking to marry Margaret, — my eldest daughter!" exclaimed Mrs. Jeffrey blankly, much disturbed by the communication that had just been made to her.

"That is my great wish, my hope," returned Roger Austin, with gentle warmth. "I need not tell you that her happiness will be my greatest object in life." It seemed perfectly natural to

him, under the circumstances, that Mrs. Jeffrey should be surprised — even agitated. Though having a genuine affection for Margaret, Roger was a man of the world; he knew his own social and financial value. Stating his errand had been the hardest part. Receiving no assistance whatever from his hostess, and his programme deserting him when most needed, he had been betrayed into an explicit, warm statement of his feelings, which had proved somewhat embarrassing to the bachelor of long standing.

Now that was over — well over, too, Roger thought, and sitting back in the spindle chair he patiently awaited Mrs. Jeffrey's reply, which he fancied he already knew; in the mean time accepting perforce, it must be confessed, the persistent attentions of Miss Weewee. Sneaking into the drawing-room in the wake of her mistress, that discriminating little animal had immediately decided to be very friendly with the visitor. After delicately sniffing at his feet, and standing upon her hind legs to lick his hand resting on the arm of the chair, Weewee proceeded to rub the whole length of her sleek dusty black body slowly and luxuriously back and forth against Mr. Austin's light trousers, as she did so emitting loud purrs of satisfaction.

Occupied with the important disclosure that had been made her, Mrs. Jeffrey failed to notice Miss Weewee's behavior, or even presence, and after several surreptitious, ineffectual attempts to dislodge the cat, Roger resigned himself to her

ministrations. It was some comfort to him to remember that it was not likely the interview would be a long one. As it happened, it was considerably shorter than he anticipated.

Mrs. Jeffrey's next remark startled her visitor into the keenest attention. "Mr. Austin, I appreciate the honor you have done Margaret — a good man's love is always an honor to a woman," she said, and now her voice had regained its usual calm evenness; "but I could not give my consent to my daughter's marriage with you until I have seen her, and have seen and talked with your sister concerning the matter."

"My sister!" exclaimed Roger, sitting up very straight in his great surprise. Then with a warm red flushing over his pale face — he was nettled — he remarked stiffly, "My sister would, of course, extend a welcome to any woman I might marry; and she is already fond of Margaret. But I do not consider her permission essential to a decision in this matter. Our family is well known in New York," — he rose from the spindle chair, unexpectedly and ruthlessly terminating Miss Wee-wee's pleasant pastime; Mrs. Jeffrey also rose, — "and the persons to whom I have referred you will, I know, gladly furnish you with full information as to my character, social standing, and financial ability to support a wife. My actions" — Roger was waxing more and more indignant — "are in no wise governed by my sister. And possessing Margaret's affection as I do, bringing to you her note of explanation this afternoon — it

seems to me I have a right to be judged by you on my own merits, without requiring the assistance of my sister."

For all his gentle, courteous manners there was no prouder man in all New York than Roger Austin, and his pride had just received a shock. He stiffened visibly.

Mrs. Jeffrey put out her hand with an impulsive gesture. "Please don't be annoyed," she said quickly. "I meant no discourtesy to you, no offense. I appreciate, as only a mother can, your love for my child, and you may be sure that her wishes in this matter shall have great weight with me. Please let me finish," she urged, as Roger uttered an exclamation. "Margaret went to Washington Square as Miss Austin's companion; she still holds that position, and this — engagement, as you speak of it — was entered into by her while under Miss Austin's roof. I should prefer hearing from Miss Austin herself her feelings in regard to it before I give you my decision. Mr. Austin," — the proud uplifting of Mrs. Jeffrey's head reminded Roger of Margaret, — "I could not endure having my daughter enter a family where, perhaps, she was not wanted. And I must hear that Miss Austin quite approves of what has happened, and of its happening in her house. I must hear it from her own lips. Perhaps she would be kind enough to call upon me."

It is doubtful if in all his life Roger Austin had been so surprised, so nonplussed, as now. Between his own astonishment and the quiet deter-

mination in Mrs. Jeffrey's manner, objections died upon the suitor's lips. "I shall acquaint my sisters with your request," he found himself saying, and, mechanically making his way out of the little drawing-room, he reached the street in a most perturbed state of mind. The afternoon had certainly been unprecedented in his experience.

CHAPTER VII

ON AND OFF

"THEN you are sure, Marian, that you don't object to going?" Roger said, in a tone of relief. It was the morning after his interview with Mrs. Jeffrey, and the brother and sister had been having a long and confidential talk. "It seemed to me — well — rather an odd proceeding. But you say it is all right, and, of course, women understand these things better than men do. And you have nothing but kind words to say — no reproaches for my marrying after so many years of delay — and not a girl of your choosing. This is very nice of you; Marian, you are one sister in a million!" Moved by unwonted emotion, Roger stooped and kissed his sister's forehead.

A pretty color flushed into Miss Austin's faded cheek; she valued highly any sign of affection from her undemonstrative brother.

"My dear Roger, I should try to be 'nice' to any woman you might make your wife, were she even a Hottentot," the little lady remarked, smiling, though there was a blur across the kindly shrewd eyes. "Leave the matter in my hands. I think you 'll find that all will be well." Then as he turned away, "Should you see Margaret

before you go out, ask her to come to me in about half an hour. I want to offer her my congratulations. Most significant she should consider them, too," — this was accompanied by a merry laugh, — "as coming from the person who knows you longest and best."

But with the closing of the door behind her brother the smile faded, and Miss Austin sat gazing sadly into the fire that leaped and cracked in the grate. She was a woman apt to take strong likes and dislikes, and to prove loyal to them; more romantic than many of her most intimate friends suspected; a little jealous, yet withal reasonable, assisted thereto by a saving sense of humor. These characteristics came to her aid in this unexpected emergency.

"We 've lived together all these years — I have been sister, friend, confidant. We have been all in all to each other. Now it will be so different! The young wife will be first — the old sister second or third — as the new influence wills it," she mused; then started in surprise when a tear fell splashing on her hand. "This will never do — never!" she ejaculated, with great energy, and sitting up very straight in her chair. "No tears, Marian Austin! Just use your common sense. For the last fifteen years and more you 've been bothering your brother to get married. You 've selected girl after girl for him, and fretted because he would n't, or could n't, admire them as you did. You have grieved to see the gray coming in his hair, with never a wife or child of his own around

him; you know you have. Remember how very much worse matters might have been: he might have gone off and married a most ineligible somebody — men, even the very nicest and most particular of them, do such mad, extraordinary things sometimes. I know Margaret — I like her — we 're accustomed to each other. And judged by herself, her people must be refined. . . . This explains the giving up of club engagements to spend evenings at home — with me, forsooth! You pride yourself on being shrewd, Marian, but you 've been blind as a mole this time. Right under your eyes — and you did n't see what was going on! . . . So it seems that, after all, Roger's will be a love match — pure and simple. Well, he deserves it, poor fellow! after waiting all these years. I should n't grumble, I 've had him to myself a good while; and I will do my share to make the future easy for them both. . . . That 's more than the prospective mother-in-law is doing. Oh, that interview must have been rich! I could scarcely keep a straight face while the dear fellow told the story. He would never see the humor of it — proper person that he is! That Roger Austin, for whom the 'smartest' girls of New York city have set their caps and smiled their sweetest — whom their papas and mammas would have welcomed with open arms as a son-in-law, — that *he* should be put on probation, so to speak, as the suitor of his sister's companion, until I vouch for him! It is too funny!" Miss Austin threw herself back in her chair, with a little hilarious stamp of her foot, and laughed and laughed, until the tears came.

The muscles round her mouth were still quivering when Margaret came in — blushing, shy, embarrassed. But the reception she met soon banished all misgivings, and set her at ease.

"So Roger tells me that you and I are to be sisters; that you have promised to be his wife," Miss Austin said gayly. Holding out a hand, she drew tall, stately Margaret down to her level and kissed her. "Well, my dear, though I am his sister, I must congratulate you on having won the affection of the very best man in New York city — as he has won one of the prettiest girls in it. May great happiness be with you both! But I wish you had told me of this yourself, Margaret. Is this the reason you 've been so preoccupied? How long has it been going on?"

The question was asked laughingly; but a deep, hot blush burned the young girl's face, the lids fell over her brilliant eyes. "I — I — only knew — less than two days ago," she stammered. "I did want you to know — but — it was so hard to tell."

With a sudden impulse Miss Austin leaned forward and laid her hand on Margaret's knee. "My dear, Roger Austin is many years older than you are; you are *quite* sure that you love him?" she asked very earnestly. With a fleeting surprise she noticed the startled expression that sprang into her young companion's eyes, but it was gone, like a flash, and the vivid rush of color, the haughty uplifting of the head, and the short almost curt reply reassured her sisterly anxiety.

"Unless I loved him, I should not be going to

marry him," Margaret answered proudly, meeting Miss Austin's searching gaze with eyes that never wavered; and the little lady liked her none the less for resenting the question, for Margaret was one of her favorites.

"Many times I have wondered what sort of a wife Roger would have — after waiting so long for her. Perhaps I have dreaded her advent a little; and now that the young lady has appeared, I am glad I can truly say that I am well pleased," she observed.

There was a tenderness in her voice that touched Margaret, completely routing her anger. Slipping to her knees, she laid her glowing cheek against the thin hand lying on Miss Austin's lap. "I love you for saying that!" she murmured caressingly. "I was afraid you might not like — you know I 'm a poor girl — and — and — besides, he 's been all yours for so long."

Roger's sister took the face of Roger's fiancée between her two hands and kissed the tremulous lips warmly. "My dear, I am well satisfied," she repeated. "Be a good wife to my brother, and I shall love you better and better. Now come take this chair beside me, and we 'll talk about him."

But it was only when they were out driving and actually turning into the street where the Jeffreys lived that Miss Austin told Margaret of her intended call upon her mother. "Now," she concluded, as the horses drew up before the apartment house, "I am going to ask you to sit in the carriage while your mother and I have our little confab.

And then," with a kindly smile and decisive nod of the head, — "then I'll lend you to the family for the rest of the day and for the night. I fancy you'll have plenty to say to them. Eh?"

"You are always so thoughtful!" Margaret said gratefully; but before the house door closed behind Miss Austin's figure, Margaret's face had grown very sober. To tell the truth, she rather dreaded that next meeting with her mother and uncle Gabriel and the girls. "They have such queer ideas about things," she told herself, staring gloomily out of the carriage window at the squat gray building on the other side of the street, the ugliness of which did not tend to raise her spirits.

Slowly and painfully Miss Austin climbed the long stairs. "Just fancy anybody having to go up and down this dreadful height every day in the year," she thought, in weary wonder, toiling up and up, with panting breath and lagging feet; then suddenly realized that she was at her journey's end.

In the hall, in the small open square before the parlor door, full in the sunshine that streamed through the skylight, were gathered together several people, some of whom were immediately classified in Miss Austin's mind as "queer."

They were Italians — a man and woman — and evidently emigrants: he, short, swarthy, dirty, looking like a sailor, with a bold glance, and in his ears small gold rings, the woman wearing a short-waisted, full-skirted, red dress. A red cotton handkerchief was tied over her black hair,

and the dark eyes beneath it were timid and appealing. She sat in a chair feeding the infant on her lap from a bowl which a tall girl, with masses of light yellow hair piled high on her head, had just filled full of milk. Clinging to the woman's skirts was another child, not long on its legs, and just then devoting all its hungry energies to a substantial slice of bread and sugar. A little gentleman, wearing a black silk skull-cap that was very much askew, was conversing in Italian with the sailor.

While Miss Austin stood hesitating whether to ring the bell near at hand or to address the party, which had been too occupied to notice her approach, the tall girl turned, saw her, and came forward.

Then any doubt of being in the right house that might possibly have entered the visitor's mind vanished. "You must be Margaret's sister — you look so like her," she said pleasantly, holding out her hand to Ruth. "I am Miss Austin."

Rufie's responsive smile brought some pretty dimples into play. "Come right into the drawing-room, won't you?" she asked; then in passing uncle Gabe, "This is my uncle, the Reverend Mr. Kincaid."

The Italians followed the introduction with open-eyed attention; even the bread and sugar repast was suspended while uncle Gabriel hauled off his cap to the little lady, putting it on again more rakishly than ever. Then Ruth, in her unconscious, stately way, still grasping the empty

milk pitcher, ushered Miss Austin into the little drawing-room, and departed to find her mother.

"H'm! fortunate thing Roger was n't with me," reflected Miss Austin, pursing up her lips at the recollection of the "queer" assemblage in the hall. "He is n't fond of the 'great unwashed' in such close proximity. That little man must be the philanthropic uncle Gabriel that Margaret has talked of. I should think he 'd be rather trying to the family sometimes — right there in the public hall, too!" Slightly ruffled, she put up her lorgnon and looked about the small room in which she sat, a little more disposed to be critical. But if the shabbiness of the surroundings did not escape her notice, neither did its air of refinement.

"Gentlefolk, without doubt," she thought, her eyes falling with satisfaction upon the bits of rare old china scattered about, on one or two of which was the Jeffrey coat of arms. "Seen better days — I thought so — furniture shows that. Nice-mannered girl, too — no awkwardness. Well, I suppose things might have been a good deal worse." Then she rose to meet Margaret's mother.

"Yes, I was very favorably impressed," the little lady told her brother that evening. "Mrs. Jeffrey is well bred, sensible, and pleasant. Perhaps a little old-fashioned in some of her ideas, — after the old-fashionedness of our dear mother, Roger, — but always seeking the truest good for her children, and without the slightest touch of artificiality about herself. You might do worse than have her for a mother-in-law. We got on

very well together — as soon as I had vouched for your respectability, sir!" This last with a laugh, in which, however, Mr. Austin did not join.

Miss Austin's call was not a short one (to the girl waiting in the carriage it seemed interminable), and the two ladies parted in the most friendly manner.

"Now you will remember," Miss Austin said playfully, yet with decision in her voice, as she and Mrs. Jeffrey stood in the hall for good-by (uncle Gabriel and his Italians had disappeared), "if I let Margaret return home to you, as you insist upon her doing, it is only on the condition that I shall have her very frequently with me. I shall want her to make me long visits. And I will take the greatest care of her, in every way; on that you may depend. As to the wedding, my brother is not a young man, he cannot afford to wait, so please you and Margaret bear that in mind. You know, there is really no reason in the world for delay," she added, gathering up her silken skirts preparatory to descending the steps.

Mrs. Jeffrey smiled. "First you must let us get accustomed to the new order of things," she answered.

There was a slight sadness in the smile and voice, which Miss Austin was quick to feel. "Don't you know the old saw? *You* will not lose a daughter but gain a son," she returned.

For an instant the two pairs of eyes met; then Margaret's mother laid her firm bare hand on the daintily gloved fingers resting on the banister.

"You are a generous-natured woman!" she said earnestly, impulsively; "don't think I do not appreciate that — for I do, sincerely."

Very soberly the little lady went down the long flights; but the face she presented to Margaret was bright and smiling. "You did n't half tell me how charming your mother is!" she declared, in her vivacious way. "Now, child, go upstairs and make the family a visit, and I will call for you to-morrow afternoon, about this time." She leaned from the carriage to say a few words more, in an undertone. "You have a good mother, Margaret, — a wise and good mother. Make the most of her — you can never get another — and you 'll need her all your life. I lost my mother when I was twenty, so I know whereof I speak. Good-by!"

Before Margaret had well reached the last flight on her way upstairs, a chorus of voices made her look up, and there, leaning over the banisters, smiling down upon her were her mother and the girls — even Ursula.

"Our paper went to press early to-day — and here I am!" answered that young woman, with joy — "almost as if I knew you were coming. Now we can all have a jolly visit together. Come along in, you dear Marnie!"

Loving hands drew Margaret up the steps and into the apartment. In a very short space of time she was hugged and kissed, her hat and coat taken off, and herself seated in a comfortable chair.

"There!" cried Frances, when this was accom-

plished. "Now do tell us what moved Miss Austin to let us have you for such a nice long visit — and to bring you here herself."

"Yes, was n't it odd of her to come?" agreed the sisters.

Then Margaret knew that they were unaware of the new state of affairs. "Please, mother, tell them," she asked, blushing deeply.

"Margaret wrote to me yesterday that she has promised Mr. Austin to marry him," Mrs. Jeffrey said briefly.

"With your consent, mother," added Margaret deprecatingly.

"With my consent," repeated Mrs. Jeffrey, in the same even tone.

"*That* was why he was coming to see you yesterday afternoon — when I met him!" cried out Judith.

And then congratulations were in order.

But taken altogether, the effect of the announcement upon the family was not such as was expected, or as the person chiefly interested considered it deserved.

"Why, I thought you people would have been perfectly astonished — and delighted — and proud. And you take it so coolly — every one of you!" she remarked, aggrieved and disappointed. "I fancy you don't realize what this means for me — for us all, in fact — for I 'd be able to do a good deal for you girls. I can tell you," growing indignant, as she remembered her plans for them, "that men of importance, such as he, don't go

about marrying girls as poor as I am, every day in the year."

"But he *is* awfully old for you, Marnie," objected Frances, to whose eighteen years Mr. Austin might as well have been an antediluvian. "Why, he 's grayer than uncle Gabriel!" At which rather dubious compliment Mr. Kincaid smiled, as he stroked his beard.

"Shall you have to live with Miss Austin, and have that sly housekeeper and the impudent footman always around?" queried Ruth practically. "Do you think you 'll like that?" with such earnestness that Frances laughed.

"Well, I found him very nice and kind that afternoon in the park," remarked Judith, to please Margaret. "And he is certainly distinguished looking. You see, Marnie," apologetically, "we hardly know Mr. Austin; perhaps, on better acquaintance, we shall grow quite fond of him."

"Oh, I 'm sure you will," returned Margaret gratefully.

"And what of poor Jim?" demanded Ursula, abruptly, standing pale and stern before her eldest sister.

"Yes, what of that poor fellow?" asked uncle Gabriel, speaking for the first time.

Margaret immediately sat up very straight and grew vehement. "I 'm not responsible for what he thinks or feels about my engagement," she cried out. "And I don't consider that he has a right to call me to account for anything I 've done. You need n't look at me in that way, Ursula. I

never told Jim Ivors that I would marry him — *never!*"

"Not in so many words, perhaps," came from the mother, very quietly and coldly. "But sometimes actions convey a promise as distinctly as could the most forcible and fluent words. You have accepted marked attentions from Jim, you have allowed him to remain under the belief that the home he was working for was for you — as his wife. You may not have said it, but you have acted it — which is the same. You knew of his buying those pieces of furniture — you helped him choose them. You have deceived Jim, Margaret. It hurts me to say it, but you have deceived our simple-hearted, faithful, honest friend. That is why I can take no pleasure in this sudden engagement. Margaret, were not Mr. Austin a rich man, surrounded by the glamour and show of worldly prosperity, would you so quickly have discovered his many virtues, and Jim's shortcomings? You were very happy in Jim Ivors's attentions before you went to Washington Square. I have no objections to Mr. Austin, I believe him to be a kindly and good man; under other circumstances I should have welcomed him as a son. What hurts me is that you should have thrown Jim over as you have. Oh, my child, I would far rather have you poor all your life, and noble hearted, than see you the wealthiest, most fashionable lady in the land, and false to your better self!" The calmness had died out of Mrs. Jeffrey's voice long before she reached this point. She finished huskily.

Margaret sprang to her feet. "Mother! — mother! I don't love Jim — I should be most *unhappy* as his wife. Would n't it be wicked to marry him when I care more for Rog — Mr. Austin?" she urged. "It is n't for the money or position, mother, truly it is n't, but because I don't care for Jim. I don't! — *I don't!*" She threw her hands out vehemently to emphasize the words.

Mrs. Jeffrey looked steadfastly into the beautiful flushed face, the brown eyes full of a wistful pleading that was hard to resist.

"You have n't once kissed me for — for — my engagement. You are n't even glad that I 'm happy," Margaret cried, swift tears brimming in her eyes, her lips trembling.

Then the mother's arms went wide open, and gathered the eldest daughter to her in a close embrace. "Oh, child, you *know* well what your happiness is to me!" she said. And stooping over the two, uncle Gabriel laid a kiss on Margaret's cheek, blew his nose sonorously, and trotted off to his little bedroom without a word.

"But you must see Jim, and tell him yourself of your engagement. That, at least, is his due — which you must give," Mrs. Jeffrey told Margaret, and sighed as she said it.

"Indeed you 'll have to — he would never believe it from any one else," drawled Ruth bluntly. "He told me that one evening some weeks ago — that he would never give you up — 'unless she herself asks her freedom from me.' That was what he

said. And then he added, 'But she 'll never do that. Peggie is true to the core!' Was n't that it, Ursula? I told you about it. Yes, that 's it — word for word," as Ursula gave a curt nod of assent and left the room.

A little shiver went through the lithe young body which Mrs. Jeffrey's arm still encircled. But Margaret lifted her head, and spoke out clearly and with decision. "Well, then, I 'll see him. I 'm sorry to have to give pain to Jim, but if I 've got to, why, it has to be done, that 's all. And the sooner the interview is over, the better."

But in spite of this brave speech, when, that evening, Frances rushed into the room where were Margaret and Ursula, and, well-nigh breathless with excitement, announced — "Jim is here! He 's in the drawing-room! Uncle Gabriel and Judy are talking to him, and mother and Rufie are almost crying out in the dining-room. Mother says better go right in," — Margaret grew white and looked very much frightened.

"Oh, Ursula!" she cried, with a gasp. "Oh, *you* go in and tell him!"

First Ursula induced Frances to leave the room, much to the disgust of the "youngest," who was all eyes and ears, and who told afterward that "cold shivers were running up and down her spine," as the result of Jim's arrival. As soon as she had gone, Ursula, with a return of the sternness she had shown in the afternoon (to cover her nervousness), said, "It is n't my place to see Jim, Margaret, it is yours. You said you would see

him, and you should. You have brought all this upon yourself."

Margaret was sitting on the edge of the bed, trying to trim a hat. Now she threw it aside, and hastily rose. "Yes, I did say I 'd go — and speak to him, and I will," she asserted shakily. "I 'm not *afraid* of Jim" — with an affort to reassure herself — "Jim Ivors that I 've known almost ever since I was born. No, indeed! Of course, I 'll go."

Passing by the bureau, she caught sight of her pale face in the glass. "What a fright I look!" she exclaimed, and pinched her cheeks to put back some color into them. "Anybody might think I was afraid," she offered in excuse, "and I 'm not. Why should I be?"

But at the door the bravado suddenly deserted her. She faced around, her eyes wide and wistful, frightened, her clasped hands working nervously. "He is going to be very angry," she whispered, — "*very* angry — and hurt. Oh, Ursula, how can I tell him!"

"Don't tell him, Marnie dear, don't!" cried Ursula eagerly, imploringly. "Tell Mr. Austin the whole story and let *him* go, and you hold to Jim, faithful old Jim! Deep down in your heart I 'm sure you must love him best."

But Margaret drew herself up and away from her sister, with a startled, haughty gesture. "Oh, *hush!*" she ordered imperiously, and left the room.

The house was very quiet, the family collected

in the dining-room trying to read or sew, but with sadly distracted thoughts and interest. And in the little bedroom Ursula sat and waited for Margaret.

By and by she came in, pale, quiet, and composed. "Well — it 's all over! He 's gone!" she announced, sitting down on the side of the bed, and looking steadily at Ursula. "He 's gone, and I suppose we 'll never meet again. He said he would never come here again — that he hoped he would *never* lay eyes on me again!"

"Was he — very angry?" asked Ursula softly.

Margaret nodded. With the greatest care she began smoothing out a piece of ribbon that lay near. "He would n't believe me — at first," she whispered, not lifting her eyes from the ribbon. "Then — he got very angry — and said some mean things. That I 'd 'played' with him — 'deceived' him — just what mother said. Then," — Margaret picked a thread or two off her lap and laid them in a paper beside her, — "then," she continued slowly, "he got cold and indifferent — I think if I 'd gone down on my knees to him, at the last, he would n't have looked at me. Fancy — *Jim!* And he was sarcastic, too — said he was so glad I 'd found out — in time — that I did n't care for him." She put her hands over her face and shuddered. "I could never — never — forget some of the things he said to me to-night. I could n't tell even you, Ursula, they hurt so!"

Presently she lifted her head. "He was n't brutal, you know," she said drearily; "he did n't

swear — or revile me — but he despises me. I — I don't think he cared so — very much, Ursula. He did n't plead — or — beg me not to give him up. But all his life — all his life — he will despise me! He said that!"

"Marnie — Marnie, my own dear sister; oh! are you sure — *sure* — that after all you don't love Jim best?" pleaded Ursula, kneeling by Margaret's side, laying her arms about her waist.

Margaret shook her head. "If I even did — he would n't come back — now. He would never trust me again — he said so; and I don't want him — I don't want him;" she roused up and spoke with more decision. "I love Roger Austin; I do truly, Ursa. He is so refined, so courtly in his manners, so neat in his dress. Perhaps it 's foolish to be influenced by such things, but I can't help it. I know I shall be much happier with him than I ever could have been with Jim. I *could* n't have gone and lived in that mean little studio all my life, and, perhaps, had to get breakfast day in and day out for him — Jim — and myself. Think what an existence! I could n't do it! I know you think me horrid, Ursula, I see it in your face, but I can't help it. How did mother ever have a child like me? Don't tell them I said all this — *please*, Ursula! They 'd think I was surely marrying Mr. Austin for his money. And I 'm not — honestly, truly, I 'm not. I really love him — far better than I ever did or could — the other man. He was too demonstrative — he tired me with his affection. So," with a long breath, "that

chapter in my life is closed. So much the better — for everybody."

Suddenly she held out her cold hands for Ursula's quick warm grasp. "Ursa — I — I — know I deserve to feel badly — I've done it all myself," she whispered, with trembling lips, "but go ask mother to come to me. Oh — I want her! I am *so* unhappy!"

CHAPTER VIII

AN ACQUISITION AND A LOSS

"JUDY, our cousin Basil-Dazzle would like to see you, right away," Frances said, putting her head into the doorway of the room where were three of her sisters.

Margaret, who was now at home until her marriage, and whose spirits by this time had quite recovered from the effects of her interview with Jim, stood before a big old-fashioned bureau, going through the ordeal, at Ruth's hands, of being "fitted." Judith hovered near, making suggestions, encouraging, criticising, and more than once, in her own especial way, pouring oil upon the troubled waters which were certain to arise on such occasions.

It was one of these times when Frances appeared and gave Basil's message. There was some excitement in the "youngest's" voice and face, but Judy was too much occupied with another small excitement to pay attention just then.

"Oh, yes, I know you 're doing your best, Ruth," Margaret was saying, making a strong effort to keep calm and polite. "But all the same, there *is* something wrong with this left shoulder. It makes me look as if I had a hump. Can't you

see it?" — as she spoke, twisting herself to get her hand upon the place.

"I 'm sure I can't help it," returned Ruth despairingly. "I 've made both sides exactly alike, and just according to the pattern. It is n't my fault."

"Well, perhaps it 's mine, then; perhaps my shoulder is growing out," suggested Margaret, growing sarcastic.

Literal Rufie's eyes opened wide. "Oh, do you think so?" she exclaimed in dismay. "Suppose I measure."

But Margaret flung away from her, with an indignant, "Indeed, I 'm not crooked! It 's the stupid old pattern that is at fault. Never mind," with a sudden accession of cold dignity; "don't bother any more with the waist, Ruth. I 'll try and do without it."

"But I thought you wanted it for the Austins' dinner — this week. You 've worn the yellow the Greenoughs sent you again and again; and you have n't anything else," Ruth reminded her.

"I 'd rather wear it a dozen times than carry this hump around on my shoulder. I 'll have to wear the old waist again, that 's all;" Margaret's martyr-like tone reduced Ruth almost to tears, and sent Judith into a spasm of laughter.

"You make me feel as if it were *my* fault that the waist won't fit you. You 're unreasonable!" declared Rufie, ready to weep, for all her height and stateliness.

"Don't be such a sensitive plant!" retorted

Margaret, beginning with angry, energetic fingers to unfasten the offending garment.

"Now, children dear, remember Dr. Watts — 'don't let your angry passions rise;' 'let dogs delight to bark and bite,' etc., etc.," admonished Judy, from the side of the bed whence she had retired to laugh at her ease. "Marnie, your hump grows larger and larger, by the minute — no wonder Ruth can't fit you. And, Rufie, there is certainly something wrong with that waist. Why, anybody with half an eye could see that. I don't suppose *this* has anything to do with the difficulty, eh?" she asked innocently, reaching out a hand and holding up to view a long white thread she had spied on Margaret's shoulder.

"The basting thread has given way — no wonder the shoulder puffed out!" cried Ruth joyfully.

"Why did n't we see it before!" exclaimed Margaret; and with renewed vigor and good nature the business of fitting was resumed.

"The atmosphere clears — peace reigns once more!" declared Judy, falling back on the bed with a prodigious sigh of relief.

"And Basil is waiting to see you. He is in the dining-room with mother," supplemented Frances, who had been a silent witness of the "fuss," as such small altercations were designated in the family.

"Did he ask for me — particularly?" demanded Judith.

On being assured that he had, Judy dipped

under Margaret's elbow to get a sight of herself in the mirror, patted her fluffy hair a few times, and then walked into the dining-room with her usual air of languid, graceful dignity.

The new cousin had become a constant visitor at the house since that first evening of his introduction, and, despite a certain roughness of manner and a habit of asking intimate questions, he had grown to be quite a favorite. This was without doubt in a great measure due to the genuine interest he displayed in all that concerned the family, and his evident enjoyment of their society. "You 're awfully good to let me come here so often, cousin Etta," he would say. "A big city is a lonely place to be in without friends." And that he rarely spoke of his own affairs, was unwilling even to approach the subject, passed almost unnoticed and entirely uncommented upon by his simple kindly relatives.

"Oh, here you are! Thought you were never coming," Basil remarked, rising to meet Judith — he had been sitting astride a chair, talking to Mrs. Jeffrey. "I guess you 'd have dropped everything and come in quick enough, had you known what I 've got here," he added, with a shrewd smile.

"Indeed! Would I? That depends," Judith answered indifferently, looking around the room for the piece of work she had thrown aside to go and be umpire at the "fitting."

"Oh, don't begin sewing right away," objected Basil. "What was it you said the other day that you 'd love to have?"

"A fortune — to help my poor people," promptly replied Judith, hunting through the work-basket for a needle.

The new cousin scowled. "Seems to me you 're always thinking of money!" he said shortly. Then as Judy shrugged her shoulders with careless unconcern, he stooped, hauled a basket from under the table, and set it before her. "Look in there," he bade her briefly.

Judith looked, and her indifference immediately vanished. "Oh, it is a doggie — a dear, darling puppy!" she cried out in enthusiastic, girlish delight. "Oh, mother! girls! come see it."

"It 's a Japanese spaniel — they 're not picked up every day — and I 've brought it especially for you," observed Basil, fairly beaming with satisfaction. "You said you would like to own a dog; and this one 's young, so you can train him as you please." He lifted the puppy out of the basket and set him on the table, round which the girls (Margaret and Ruth had joined the group) crowded, exclaiming over his many perfections.

"He is a beauty! And as he is a Jap, I 'll name him Count Ito," declared Judith. "Don't all of you think that is suitable?"

The count was indeed a thoroughbred: his silky black coat curled beautifully, his nose was of the shortest, the sauciest, and most snubby of snubs, and a reigning belle might have envied him his eyes, large, brown, and soft as velvet. When he cocked his youthful head on one side, with a shrill, friendly little bark, and then fell to chewing Ju-

dith's finger, she caught the little creature up in her arms and kissed him in an ecstasy of ownership and delight. "You 're the dearest, sweetest, cutest little doggie in all the world!" she cried. "I have never before had a pet all of my very own. Thank you ever and *ever* so much, Basil!" lifting to the new cousin a flushed, happy face.

"Oh, that 's nothing," Basil said modestly. "I am glad you like him." Then added in an undertone, confidentially, unwisely, drawing a little nearer, "Now we are all right again — you and I — are n't we? You know," he explained, seeing perplexity in Judy's face, — "you know, you got provoked with me because I did n't offer — before Jim Ivors did — to go with you that first evening I came here. Remember? Well, I did n't know you then — I would n't do that now. The dog is a peace-offering — see? Now we 're good friends, are n't we?"

Judith's eyes opened wide in amazement and her pale cheeks flamed; she set Count Ito down hard. "What! you offer me this dog as a bribe to be friends with you?" she cried breathlessly; she was very angry. "You have made a mistake" — Judy's graceful head went up; "I 'm not of the sort to be won over by presents. Take back your dog." She gave the sprawling count a shove toward his former owner.

"Why — but" — stammered Basil, in astonishment. "If you are n't the queerest girl! I thought women liked to receive presents."

"I 'm not 'women,' I 'm only one woman; and I

answer — 'not when they are intended as bribes,'" retorted Judith. "I am not a child to be coaxed into friendliness by a present. I despise that sort of thing!" Her eyes flashed contempt at the discomfited cousin.

"I will not take it back," declared Basil sulkily.

"Mother! girls!" Judith raised her voice. "Basil has brought all of you this lovely dog," she said.

"Why, I thought 't was yours," put in Frances.

"So it is, but she won't keep it," ruefully explained Basil.

Mrs. Jeffrey saw the furrow between Judy's eyebrows, her compressed lips, and kindly came to the rescue. "Come over here, Basil, and tell me how to take care of the count," she called. "I know that these foreign dogs have to have different treatment from ours."

But very soon Basil came back to Judith. Sitting at the table playing with the contents of her work-basket he said, in a low aggrieved voice, "D' you know, Judy, you 're awfully hard on a fellow. The other girls 're pleasant enough, but you — why you don't treat me even halfway decent — just because I happened to offend you that first evening. I want to be friends with you. In fact," with a sudden burst of feeling, "I 'd rather be friends with you than with any girl I know — than with any girl in — the whole world. There, now!"

His tone implied that he was paying her an immense compliment, but Judith was not at all impressed. Quite unmoved, and without a word,

she threaded her needle and continued sewing on the little warm frock she was making for one of her poor children.

Basil's light eyes gazed perplexedly at the graceful down-bent head, the slender fingers flying in and out of the heavy dark material in her lap. "Wonder if she 'd treat me differently if she knew?" he thought, and scowled fiercely. "Look here, Judy," he said presently, with an earnestness in his voice that had some slight effect upon the stony-hearted young person to whom his remarks were directed, — "look here, I want to be friends — real honest, true friends — with you. Tell me how to set about it, will you? You would n't go to the theatre the other evening when I took the rest of the family. You said you had something to do, but I know better. Now you won't take the dog; and I went to an awful lot of trouble" ("and expense," he nearly added, but caught himself in time) "to get just the kind I thought you 'd like. You 're hard on me, that 's what you are. I did n't mean the pup as a bribe, as you call it. I simply wanted to do something for you that you 'd like. If you won't accept attentions or presents, tell me something I *can* do for you." As he spoke, in his mind Basil recalled a long list of young ladies who had by no means been loth to extend their friendship to him, and, while conscious of a vague wonder at his present humility, yet repeated, "Tell me of something I can do for you."

Judith dropped her work and met her cousin's gaze directly. "You can go to the night school I

told you about the other day, and teach the boys wood-carving," she said demurely. "You do it so well."

"Eh? — what — oh, but every night in the week?" he cried, flushing crimson, considerably taken aback.

"No; two nights in the week, from seven to nine o' clock," returned Judith crisply. A little sarcastic smile that curved her lips stung the young fellow. "Some people make glib offers that they never intend to have accepted. I might have known yours were of that order," she said.

"Oh, but, Judith, tell me something reasonable," he objected warmly. "I don't know anything about those boys; I would n't know how to teach 'em!"

"Time you learned, then," was the uncompromising reply, and Judy turned coldly from him. "Mother, will you show me how to put in this sleeve?" she asked.

Just then the front door was heard to close; some one came along the hall and paused in the doorway. For an instant the family gazed at the newcomer in unrecognizing silence, then, "Gabriel — what *have* you been doing to yourself?" almost screamed Mrs. Jeffrey, rising and taking a step forward in her surprise.

"Oh, uncle Gabe, your beautiful beard!" cried the girls, in one piteous wail. Miss Weewee stood on her hind legs in Count Ito's basket, which she had been investigating, and gazed critically at her master. And leaning forward in his chair,

elbows on his knees, chin in his palms, Basil surveyed the little gentleman with grim curiosity.

Sure enough, the pointed, glossy brown beard which had for so many years adorned Mr. Kincaid's face, and been a source of comfort in meditation, was now gone, revealing in its absence a chin more gentle and benign than remarkable for strength.

"Oh, Gabriel! how *could* you do it?" demanded Mrs. Jeffrey tragically; and every one waited in silence for Mr. Kincaid's reply.

Uncle Gabriel made a deprecating movement of his thin hands. "My dear, I — I — did it for the best," he remarked tremulously. Divesting himself of his long-skirted overcoat, he drew out his cap and proceeded to fit it over his head with shaking fingers. This done he faced his family, the usual smile gone from his lips, the jaunty air from his manner. "There was a great deal of gray in my beard, Etta, a *great* deal. Judith, you noticed it" (the family immediately turned a reproachful glance upon Judy, who looked self-convicted); "and I think that has interfered with my getting a parish," uncle Gabriel explained, his eyes traveling from one to another of the assemblage, mutely asking sympathy and approval. "You know, wardens and vestrymen don't like to place their parish in charge of an old-looking man. One can't altogether blame them for that. My hair — well, we call it that by courtesy; there 's only a fringe left," — a gleam of amusement flitted over uncle Gabe's expressive face, —

"so there 's no use considering that; and quite young men are bald in these days. But a beard like mine, thick and noticeable," with a reminiscent sigh, "and almost all gray, does make a man look older. As you all know, I 've been asked to preach in place after place, and I think I have given them good sermons," throwing an appealing glance at Judith, who nodded emphatically. "But nothing has come of these visits, these sermons — polite attentions, some compliments, perhaps, but no parish. This failure of a field of work has troubled me greatly. And after serious reflection — very serious reflection — I came to the conclusion, induced by a remark I accidentally overheard, — it was not intended to wound me, and it showed me my duty, — I came to the conclusion that this," he made a motion to caress his beard, then remembering the loss, dropped his hand heavily to his side, — "that it interfered with my usefulness. So to-day — I had it taken off."

"I don't see how *any*body could possibly have found fault with that beautiful beard!" cried Francie, still inconsolable.

"*I* think he looks older without it," drawled Ruth, and was indignant at the sharp nudge her twin gave her to be silent.

"But why did you do it now — in cold weather?" remonstrated Mrs. Jeffrey. "After wearing a beard for so many years you will certainly have a sore throat — or worse — without it. Really, Gabriel, this is a piece of recklessness. Why could n't you have waited until the summer?"

"Because," — Mr. Kincaid put his hands in his pockets and jingled his keys, in an attempt to be jocular, — "because I have been asked to preach in Enfield next Sunday, and I should like to be called to that parish. There 's work there waiting for some one, why not for me? What 's personal appearance compared to one's usefulness? That is the first object to be considered, especially by a clergyman — a minister of the Gospel. I don't regret what I 've done, no," stoutly, "it was the right — the only thing to do, when once I understood it. You know, my dears," peering at his women folk, in spite of his own opinion, anxious for their approval, "this inactivity wears upon me." He grew earnest. "I should prefer a parish where I might have the privilege, with our Lord's help, of cheering, strengthening, and uplifting — of loving and comforting the souls committed to my charge. What is a — eh — slight personal loss compared with that?"

"Well, your surplice is ready; I did it up for you only yesterday," Ruth informed him. "And," cheerfully, "anyway, uncle Gabe, you can grow another beard. 'T will take time, but you can do it — after you have settled down in your parish. That would n't prevent your working hard, you know, or people from liking you."

Mr. Kincaid shook his head. "No," he said slowly. "I think I will never let my beard grow again. You know I shall be getting older every day — I 'll not be able to afford it. A man al-

ways looks younger with a shaven face. Eh?" He turned to Basil for confirmation.

"Oh, sure! and it 's fashionable, too," replied that individual, with easy acquiescence and a broad grin, which last brought him a flash of disapproval from Judith's eyes.

"The train — I looked it up — goes early on Sunday morning," continued uncle Gabriel, quite unconscious of the new cousin's facetia at his expense, "and I think I should like Judith to go with me. The railroad fare," apologetically, "is high, or I should have you all go — and she has the critical faculty" (here Basil gave a grunt which set Frances giggling, and which Judith, very properly, ignored); "she could tell me afterward if — if I did well or ill."

"Certainly I 'll go with you, uncle Gabriel, and be glad to," Judy assured him, with a smile which the new cousin would have been delighted to have had directed at himself.

"Thank you, my dear," the little man said gently, as he left the room.

Something in his voice, a certain unwonted sadness, appealed to several of those who heard it. "Poor Gabriel!" sighed Mrs. Jeffrey, and Frances dashed after Mr. Kincaid.

"Dear old boy! Him *does* feel badly over it," she declared, in the foolish loving talk common between them, and thrusting her hands through his arm she brought him to a sudden halt.

Uncle Gabriel patted her shoulder. "Nothing should stand in the way of the Lord's work," he

said quietly. "And when I discovered that the gray in my beard interfered with my getting a parish — there could be no other reason" — with a wistful unconscious egoism that the niece fully shared — "why, it was but right that the beard should go. It is a trifle, Frances, not deserving of consideration, but human nature is weak, very weak! And I've worn that beard since I was a very young man. There are memories connected with it; my little son's fingers" — Uncle Gabriel's lips began twitching, his voice was husky. He hastily kissed Frances on the forehead. "I appreciate your sympathy, it comforts me. But go, now," he whispered, pushing her gently from him. "And don't mention to the others of my weakness." Stepping into his little room, Mr. Kincaid drew the portière across the door; and Frances slowly retraced her steps to the dining-room.

In her absence there had been an addition to the number. Ursula sat on the floor making acquaintance with Count Ito, and, incidentally, defending him from the attacks of Miss Weewee, who jealously resented the little dog's advent. The count's knowledge of cat nature being as yet nil, he had voluntarily given up the chewing of Ursula's finger to waddle consequentially across to Miss Weewee, on friendly thoughts intent. His reception was, to him, both unexpected and painful, for with back uplifted, flashing eyes, and swelling tail, Miss Weewee hissed, and swiftly dealt the too confiding visitor a stinging blow in the face. Yelping, the puppy backed away as fast

as he could, and was caught up in Ursula's arms, amid cries of sympathy and bursts of laughter from the lookers-on.

It was in the midst of this hubbub that Frances walked in.

"Oh, Francie, there 's a letter for you, on the table," Ursula said, without looking up. "I took it from the postman. Oh, girls! is n't this the most fascinating little dog that ever was! Basil, you deserve a vote of thanks from us all for giving him to us!" And again she fell to admiring the count's silken coat, and what she was pleased to call his "starry eyes."

Meanwhile the "youngest" had pounced upon her letter and read it. "Oh, mother!" she cried, with a little gasp of excitement, her brown eyes brilliant, "just think! it 's from Mr. Rose's sister — Mrs. Erveng — about what we spoke of that first evening he came here. You know, I told you about it. He said the other day that she was out of the city, and she mentions here that she was in Boston. Listen, mother!"

"Oh, let us all hear it," urged Margaret. "I know Mrs. Erveng, and like her immensely, too. And I 'll know her better by and by. Read it out, Francie — eh, mother? We don't mind Basil; he is our cousin, and no better off in worldly goods than we are ourselves." Since her engagement Margaret sometimes assumed a little consequential air that was rather exasperating to the family, and that now brought a broad smile to Basil Fabrey's lips.

"Oh, don't mind me in the least; sail right ahead with the letter. I 'd like nothing better than to listen," he declared.

Ursula asked laughingly, "How old are you, Miss Marnie? you talk like a grandmother;" and Judith hastily whispered to her twin, "Would n't you believe we were all about so big?" holding her finger and thumb about an inch apart.

At a nod from her mother, and with a little preliminary flourish of, "Now, ladies and gentlemen (Count Ito, your humble servant!), lend me your ears," Frances read Betty Erveng's letter aloud: —

My dear Miss Jeffrey, — My brother Jack tells me you are willing to give me some lessons in the gentle art of making a room look homelike and pretty. I am sadly in need of such knowledge, and shall be delighted to be taught, though I must warn you that you will have a fearfully and wonderfully stupid pupil to deal with. I felt I ought to say this, but I hope it will not frighten you. I promise you 'I 'll surely be good.' That is what my small son says, in all honesty, but the temptations of the world sometimes upset the little man's resolutions. Let us hope that his mother may do better! Could you come to me to-morrow morning about ten? Then we might pull the furniture to pieces and be able to put it together again with less danger of interruption than there would be later in the day. I intended to write to you weeks ago in regard to this matter, but have been making a rather long visit in Boston, with

the children, returning home only a few days ago. Hoping to see you to-morrow,

Yours cordially,

ELIZABETH ROSE ERVENG.

"Now, is n't that nice and friendly?" finished Francie, almost in the same breath in which she had read the letter. "Mother, I 'll go to-morrow, may n't I?"

"She is almost the very nicest member of a *very* fine family," remarked Margaret, still somewhat superior.

"Oh, I like Jack Rose!" asserted Mrs. Jeffrey, and Judith and Frances, almost as if some one had maligned their favorite.

"So do I — and Paul Rose, too," said Ursula, bending over the count's silky ears.

Paul and Alan had made their first visit to the Jeffreys under Jack's leadership, and had called several times since then, together and alone.

"Well, I think he is conceited; and he makes fun of people," objected Margaret.

"No, he does n't make fun of people — at least, I 'm sure he never has of us," declared Ruth, with such emphasis that everybody laughed, much to Rufie's surprise.

"They 're all wonderful creatures, those Roses — perfectly wonderful — that should be put in a glass case! Little tin gods on wheels!" Basil's tone was not pleasant. He stood up, shook down the creases in his trousers, and reached for his hat. "Well, I 'm off," he remarked brusquely.

"No — can't stay to tea to-night, cousin Etta. Good-by, all!" He waved his hat carelessly to the group in the dining-room; then turned back in the doorway and paused. "Good-by, Judith!" he said pointedly.

"Good-by!" she returned coolly, hunting in her mother's work-basket for something she did not need, and with averted head, to hide a smile.

CHAPTER IX

GIVING LESSONS

It was with cold hands and a fast beating heart that Frances Jeffrey sat in Mrs. Erveng's drawing-room, waiting for the mistress of the house. Now that the longed-for opportunity had come, the "youngest's" courage began to desert her. Later in the day, giving the family a vivid and (save for one incident) detailed account of her visit, she said, "When I saw that room, I felt as the Queen of Sheba did when she came to Solomon and beheld all his greatness and wealth! There was no more spirit in me!"

As Francie's eyes roamed around the pretty room in which she sat, her opinion of her own ability fell lower and lower. "The conceit of my coming here to teach her anything when she can make a place look like this! I 'll soon get taken down — and I deserve it!" she thought in self-abasement, and was even contemplating sneaking out of the house and away, when there came the tap — tap of boot-heels descending the polished stairs and along the hall, and Mrs. Erveng entered.

For all that she had been married several years and had two children upstairs in the nursery, Betty

Rose — beg pardon! Betty Erveng — still looked a veritable girl. The responsibilities of wifehood and motherhood had softened her brusqueness and enlarged her sympathies, while still leaving her the originality and good spirits that had always made her what her brother Jack and many others considered as "splendid company"!

"Good-morning; I am so glad you could come!" Betty said, such cordiality in her voice and manner that her visitor's shyness vanished almost before they were seated on a lounge together.

But Frances had something to say, too. "Mrs. Erveng, I feel as if I had come here under false pretenses — and was a perfect fraud!" she hastily declared, growing very rosy over the confession. "Perhaps you think I have wonderful taste in — in — arranging a room — I don't see how I ever could have talked so conceitedly to Mr. Rose! I feel I should tell you that I could not, I really *could n't*, contrive anything half so pretty as this," with a little wave of her hand, and a despairing glance around the drawing-room.

Betty threw back her head and laughed — such a contagious laugh that Francie's lips, too, began to widen before she at all realized what she was smiling at.

"Did you imagine that *I* arranged this room?" Betty asked. "Why, I could n't have made it look as it does to save my life! This is my sister Nora's work — Mrs. Whitcombe. She has the most exquisite taste in such matters, and I have absolutely none. No, really, that is true, as you

will soon find out for yourself. All the same, I 'm continually changing the furniture all over the house. One does get so tired of seeing the same chairs and tables and things always in the same places. Don't you think so? And I can't keep bothering my sister to help me tear my house to pieces and put it together again *every* week. So I thought, from what my brother mentioned, that perhaps you would take pity on a fellow creature less gifted than yourself, and give me some lessons. Some to-day, some others next week, and the next week, and so on, — whenever the fever for a change of furniture should take hold of me. Will you?"

"Oh, I should be very glad to, if — if — you think I could," Frances said doubtfully.

"I am quite sure you could," asserted Betty confidently. "Has n't my brother told me of your pretty and cosy rooms, your planning and handiwork! Jack has often spoken to me of you and your sisters, Miss Jeffrey." Betty's friendliness won the last bit of Francie's heart that had not, with girlish impetuosity, already been bestowed upon her.

"He is my favorite brother," went on Betty, "and, of course, I feel a great interest in his friends and work. I know all about Miss Ursula's writing — I always read her stories in the Leader; and about Miss Judith, and your uncle — all the family, in fact. And I have met your eldest sister a number of times; I mean the one who is engaged to Mr. Austin. How handsome she is! So I don't at all feel as if we were strangers. I

hope you 'll not feel so, either. Now, won't you come upstairs with me, and take off your things? I am getting the children ready to go out for their morning walk and play in the park. After that we can attack the furniture."

The Ervengs' nursery was a large bright room, in which wide spaces of the wall were allowed to appear between the disposition of the simple furniture. These spaces were covered with pictures of all shapes and sizes, unframed, and most of them pasted or glued on to the walls, low enough to the floor to be on a level with the vision of a small child. Some of the pictures were in bright colors, others in black and white, and the subjects were varied. Not all of childish subjects were they, but all interesting, and in a way, in themselves, an education for the little folk whose room they ornamented. The "Boy Christ in the Temple" had a place among them, and there were prints of Schenk's pathetic "Sheep lost in a Snow-Storm," of Rosa Bonheur's "Lion and Cubs," and of what Betty's little son persisted in calling "'T'umpets an' 'Ingin' Boys" — Della Robbia's "Trumpeters" and his "Singing Boys."

The same young gentleman was now astride a stick and careering wildly around the apartment, with his nurse in hot pursuit. The chase, however, came to a sudden stop at the entrance of Mrs. Erveng and Frances.

"Why, Hilliard! what does this mean?" demanded Betty.

"He 's tore the lion off the wall, ma'am," ex-

plained the nurse, panting with her exertions; while the unabashed offender threw his heels and the end of the cane up into the air, and waved the picture.

"Him was tummin' off, muvver, I on'y helped him a 'ittle bit," he protested.

"Instead of pulling the lion off, you might have got Ann to paste it on properly," Betty informed her son.

The wee man's eyes danced with mischief, a row of small even white teeth came to view in a broad smile. "But I jus' fraught he'd like to live anuver place, muvver — he 's been so long over there," he urged, in excuse.

Mother and son looked at one another for a minute or two, and then laughed aloud. There was perfect understanding between them. "Oh, you humbug!" cried Betty. Catching up her son, she tossed him high in the air, until his blouse skirts and his yellow curls flew out around him, to his infinite enjoyment. "Now, sir, march off and get the paste, and we 'll put the poor lioness and her cubs right where they belong!" she ordered, when the small boy was once more on his feet. "Some other day, if you remind me, we can change the pictures, and find another place for Mrs. Lion, but not to-day. I want to get you and Alice off for your walk. Now, hurry with the paste."

"This is one of my theories," Betty told Frances, with a wave of her hand toward the pictures, "and," laughingly, "that small son of mine

has been the victim of all my theories, and yet is a pretty good-looking specimen, is n't he?" gazing with pride at the little fellow's straight active body, his fine color, bright eyes, and yellow curls. "I can throw Liard up to the ceiling, double him up, stand him on his head — anything! He enjoys it, thrives on what one of his aunts designates as his mother's 'roughness'! But I can't do that with my little daughter. She is too shy and timid — nervous, and so fragile that sometimes I hardly know how to treat her. I get so afraid that — that I may not always have her! Those great solemn eyes of hers frighten me! She should have been Nannie's child. Oh, Miss Jeffrey," with enthusiasm, "I have the dearest, best elder sister that was ever put into the world! Perhaps you have heard Jack speak of her — Mrs. Maxwell Derwent. I never, *never* could have brought up these children, even so far as they 've gone, without her help. I want you to meet her some day."

"Come, sweetheart!" Betty held out her hands to the delicate little creature who was hanging on to her nurse's skirts. "Come to mother, and we 'll go help Liard to put Mrs. Lion and her babies back on the wall. Come, Miss Jeffrey, won't you, and witness the performance."

Sitting on the floor, her little daughter in her lap, Betty directed her sturdy young son in the pasting and proper adjusting of the lion and her cubs. The boy was full of talk and laughter, bubbling over with fun and good spirits. But the little sister sat in solemn silence, shrinking back

and hiding her face in her mother's shoulder, when, in an access of brotherly affection, Liard offered to let her paste "Mrs. Lion's" head on. Then hats and coats were donned and the little folk dispatched for the morning's play in the neighboring park.

"Now, Miss Jeffrey, suppose we begin our lesson," Betty suggested, leading the way to her sitting-room. "There! I fancy you will not fall in love with *this* arrangement; I had the ordering of it," she said, laughing. "Room for improvement, is n't there?"

"Well — I think, perhaps, we might put the lounge and that beautiful piece of statuary so — and so," Frances returned hesitatingly, and indicating with motions the positions to which she referred.

Betty laid a hand on her visitor's arm. "The whole arrangement shows want of taste," she declared, "only you are too polite to say so. Now I am going to ask you always to be honest — perfectly frank — with me. I prefer that, even if it should hurt my vanity. The arrangement of this room is entirely my own; is it hopeless?"

"No, indeed!" cried Frances eagerly. "It — it is n't quite as artistic as might be, perhaps; but it is far from being commonplace. By pulling the lounge this way," suiting the action to the word, "and changing the other things about a little, the room would be very pretty. That wide windowed front and the corner seats are odd."

"My husband and I are very fond of this old

house," Betty said, with a demure reminiscent smile. In the room directly under the one in which she and Frances then stood, Betty had once, with her brother Phil's unasked assistance, undertaken to engage Mr. Erveng, senior, as a publisher for her father's long delayed scientific work, so called the "Fetich." "Now if you will give me your ideas and let *me* make the changes?" Betty asked. "I can always get so much clearer an understanding of anything like this by actually working it out myself. And should any piece of furniture prove too heavy for our strength, I'll call in our Figaro — our factotum — our man of all work. His name is Peter, but he is such a fat fussy little creature that I think Figaro suits him best, so I call him that. Now, where shall we begin?"

There was nothing that Francie so enjoyed — beside singing — as changing or arranging the furnishings of a room. And now she threw herself into this favorite occupation with a zest and interest that infected Betty, and caused that young matron, as she expressed it, to "evolve ideas, so brilliant as to astonish herself!" They pulled lounges all over the room until precisely the right location for them was found; discovered new positions for chairs, tables, book-shelves, piano; changed the pictures and bric-à-brac, and, altogether, thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

It was near the end of the morning's work, the finishing touches were being given, Betty filling a vase with roses, Frances on a step-ladder putting

the last picture into place, when two visitors came in, unexpected and unannounced.

"What a happy transformation!" cried the foremost one — a sweet-faced, gentle-voiced woman, with brown eyes and light brown hair.

"Oh, Nan! you dear thing!" cried out Betty, dropping the roses and rushing forward to welcome her. "You've come to lunch, of course. And Jack! Well, this is nice, to have you both. Miss Jeffrey," to Frances, perched at the top of the step-ladder, "this is my sister, Mrs. Maxwell Derwent. I think you are already acquainted with this young man."

"Yes," Jack answered for Francie, "Miss Frances and I are old friends." Then, as the two sisters disappeared into the next room for Nannie to take off her "things," Jack went to the foot of the step-ladder and looked up at Francie, an unmistakable expression of content in his quiet honest face. "I am so glad to find you here," he said. "I hope you two," with a little jerk of his head in the direction Betty had taken, "like one another."

"Oh, I think she is charming!" Frances declared enthusiastically. "I've had a beautiful morning! And it's all due to your kindness."

It was Jack's opinion that she, herself, was very charming as she sat there looking down upon him with such happy brilliant eyes, and the corners of her mouth curving merrily upward. From Betty's laughing introduction, her friendly nod at Frances, he knew that the liking between the two girls was mutual, and this gave him peculiar satisfaction.

He had some time ago decided that he wanted these two to be good friends.

"Seems to me the kindness is on your side; you have worked wonders in this room," he said, glancing around him. "Let me help you down. Have you looked at these etchings? My brother-in-law prides himself on their excellence."

In chatting and looking over the etchings, the few minutes of Betty's absence from the room passed very quickly, and, to one at least, very pleasantly.

"I wish you had brought baby Max. He is such a jolly little King Cole," Betty was saying as she and Nannie returned.

"My dear, I have brought Felix, John, and Margaret; I think you will find them enough with your two," laughed Mrs. Derwent.

"I can't accustom myself to calling that small chap anything but 'Son;' the name seems to belong to him," remarked Jack.

"That is the result of allowing a nickname; it is so difficult to drop. How many of our intimate friends, do you suppose, ever remember that Mädel's name is Valentine?" Nannie said. "You must know, Miss Jeffrey," she explained to Frances, "that there are only four in our family by the name of Felix. My twin brother, Felix Rose, whom we commonly call Fee,'" — the old-time tenderness came again into Nan's voice as she spoke of her dearly loved "twinnie," — "then his son, small Felix, whom his uncle Phil has dubbed 'Feefo,' and the funny name sticks. Number three is our

brother Phil's — our eldest brother's — eldest son; he is another Felix. But as he lives with his parents in Chicago, he does not add to the confusion of names here. My sturdy eldest boy is also Felix. I mention him last, but he was really the first to be named for his uncle." Nan said this with a little unconscious pride that made Betty smile. "When a baby, we got into the habit of calling him 'Son;' but now, as he grows older, I think we should drop that," went on Nan. "I have some faith in the influence of names, and I want both — all — my sons to live up to those they bear, to walk uprightly, as do those of the same name who are preceding them. My second son is the namesake of his grandfather, my father, and of his uncle Jack; my youngest son of *his* father."

"*My* eldest hope unites in his small person his father's name and his mother's lungs; do hear those gentle yells!" remarked Betty, as a succession of lusty shouts arose from the narrow walk beneath the window, which ran from the high iron gates that inclosed the Ervengs' front yard to the low piazza of the house.

"Muvver! Muvver! — comin'!" was all that could be distinguished.

"We 'll hear the whole story in a few minutes; they are on the way up," Betty observed placidly. Then as, for the first time, her eyes fell upon Jack's head, "Jack Rose! your hair is a sight!" she exclaimed. "It is standing up in the wildest fashion! What have you been doing, writing or worrying, or both? That is one of the

eccentricities of genius, Miss Jeffrey" — Betty never could resist a joke at Jack's expense — "of this genius, at any rate. Whenever he begins to think very hard, or to worry about anything — he can do that, too — Jack's hands go at his hair, with this result." She pulled her reluctant brother around for Frances to have a good view of him.

"Betty!" exclaimed the elder sister, but laughing; and "Oh, come now, Betty!" remonstrated Jack, in a ruffled tone. He got very red, and threw a deprecatory glance at Frances, while hastily trying, with both hands, to flatten down his refractory locks.

But Francie's sharp eyes had noticed the condition of Jack's hair when first he entered the room, and she had had her laugh then. Ursula's description of this peculiarity of the young editor had prepared her for it, and now, with a swift glance that in some mysterious way conveyed to Jack the assurance of her sympathy, she said, "Don't you think that all people who write — you know, literary folk — have some such little peculiarity? I know uncle Gabriel *always* gets his cap away over on one ear when he is writing editorials. And Ursula likes to hold her chin with one hand while she writes with the other."

"Here come the children!" cried Betty, as the door flew open.

So it was, and with them a tall lady, very beautiful, very stately, and slow and languid of manner — haughty, some might have called her.

"Aun' Nonie!" announced Liard and the two

sturdy handsome boys who followed at his elbow, in one big voice. Nannie's small daughter, Margaret, brought up the rear of the procession, with a protecting arm thrown around her shy little cousin Alice.

"I called to see you, Nan, and hearing that you were here, came down. I thought we could all visit together," explained Nora, sinking into a chair, "Oh dear!" putting a hand quickly to her ear as the boys gave an unexpected whoop of joy over some new possession — Nora had no children.

"I 'm delighted to have you, Nonie," cried Betty. "Three of the family — why, this is my red-letter day! Now you chat with Nan while I give an order. I 'll be back in a minute or two." As she went by Nannie, Betty could not resist the rapid whisper: "Do see Nonie's eyes open! She is wondering how *I ever* arranged this room!"

"Miss Jeffrey! — oh, no, I can't let you go," she said quickly to Francie, who had followed her out into the hall. "Now, please stay and have some lunch with us. Oh, but you must really. I've just thought of something! Help me put some dainty touches to the lunch-table, won't you? Mrs. Whitcombe's table always puts mine to shame; now, help me give her a surprise! Here are flowers left from the sitting-room vase. And in this cabinet are china and glass, Hester will show you. And do just as you would in your own home. Yes, Jack, yes; I'm coming. Excuse me, Miss Jeffrey!"

Leaving Frances, Betty, in response to her

brother's call, went hurriedly into the next apartment, which was separated from the dining-room by heavy portières closely drawn.

"What a pretty home; and how happy they all seem to be!" thought Frances, as she gave some loving extra touches to a bunch of roses and delicate fairy ferns. The table was ready, and looked so pretty that the young person whose good taste and deft hands had worked the magic began to sing softly to herself. "How I wish mother and the girls could see this!" she said, and again fell to humming her tune, until she glanced at the "grandfather's" clock which ticked at one end of the room. "It 's late; ought I to tell the maid to announce luncheon?" she thought uneasily; "I wonder where Mrs. Erveng is?" And just then she heard Betty's voice; it came from the other side of the portière.

"Paul ought to be ashamed of himself to make us all this trouble!" she was saying, and most emphatically. "Nannie or Felix should give him a good talking to!"

"You know he won't listen to Fee," came in troubled tones from Jack, "and Nan is too anxious about Max" —

With fingers in her ears Francie ran out of the room, into a little hall which led off from the dining-room, and at the end of which was a window overlooking the yard.

Here Betty found her, a little later. "Why! I've been looking for you," she said. "I thought you were in the dining-room."

"I was," Frances explained, blushing hotly, "until — I — heard you and your brother — talking. Then I came away as quickly as I could."

"About Paul!" cried Betty. "What did you hear?" Then, when Frances had told her, "Well, I would n't tell every one, but I will you; as long as you heard that, you should hear the rest. Oh, indeed," hastily, "I know 't was my fault for speaking so loud," as Francie began a protest. "And I really do not mind your knowing it at all. Jack tells me that Judge — my brother Paul — visits at your house, so perhaps you ought to know. *I* think that Jack is the cleverest — with Felix — of the Rose boys, and he is the most faithful, unselfish creature! But the rest of the family, and a good many other persons, too, think there never was such a brilliant, clever young man as Paul. He has heard that ever since he was a little chap, and it has just spoiled him. He won't study; he thinks he can make up by a spurt at the last, and that 's dangerous, you know; he might get plucked. Paul is a great favorite with certain of his classmates and — well, that makes him spend more money than he has any right to. And Jack and I are afraid he is in with a pretty dissipated set. They keep late hours; Paul is out night after night, though papa does n't know of it. He will not let one of us offer a word of remonstrance. Even Felix he won't listen to. And the last time Nan spoke to him about his behavior, Paul got *very* angry — would n't go near her for weeks! Nannie, mind you, who has been

almost a mother to him! I feel dreadfully mean to have told you all this about Judge, though it is every word true," Betty cried out, the color coming into her face. "I hate people that talk against their own flesh and blood, and I would n't have done it now except for my having a feeling that perhaps you might, in some way or other, be able to help us with Paul. Still, I should n't have burdened you with our family troubles. Please don't mention what I have told you to any one!"

Frances had listened with the deepest interest. "Oh, may n't I tell Ursula?" she asked eagerly, "only Ursula. She knows your brother Paul; *she* thinks he is very clever. When he comes to the house they talk together a good deal — about books, you know. And the other afternoon he met her near the office and walked home with her. Ursa has such a nice way of saying things; she might be able to say something" — Francie stopped, embarrassed, coloring vividly.

"Ursula? Ursula? Who said something to me lately about your sister Ursula?" Betty asked herself thoughtfully. "I don't mean about her stories — that was Jack. I do believe," slowly, in a tone of conviction, "that it was — Paul. It was! Yes, Miss Jeffrey, tell your sister Ursula. But no one else, please!"

"Indeed I will tell only her," promised Frances earnestly.

"Muvver, I are hung'y," clamored Betty's small son, arriving on the scene, and recalling his parent to her duties as hostess.

"Are you, little man? Well, I fancy everybody else is, too," she said, going hastily into the dining-room. "Hester, announce luncheon at once. Come, Miss Jeffrey. And thank you very much for making such a success of the table. My sister Nora approves of all the changes we 've made this morning, which speaks well for your taste. She is very critical. Ah, here they all come!"

Immediately after luncheon Frances took her departure, and Jack walked part of the way home with her. He was kind, and, as Ursula was fond of saying, very "fatherly" in his manner, though more silent than usual. But Frances understood the silence — she knew now the cause of that troubled expression in Jack's eyes, and while provoked with Paul, was yet unconsciously well pleased to share Jack's secret, and full of sympathy for him.

"I am very glad that you and Betty got on so well together," he said, as they stood for a few minutes at the corner of a street for good-by. "She tells me you 've promised to go to her again next Thursday morning. If I can arrange my work that day to leave the office, perhaps," diffidently, blushing a deep red, — "perhaps I 'll drop in, to see what you two have done."

Frances nodded gayly. "Yes, come, and we 'll set you to work; we 'll get you to do all the moving," she told him saucily. And, of course, cheered by the prospect of pulling and lifting his sister's furniture, Jack made his adieux, and went away with a much brighter face.

He came running back to say something more.

"Oh, I forgot," he said hurriedly. "Please tell your sister Ursula for me that if she'll have the manuscript of her novel all ready by Monday, I will send for it. I've talked to my — a publisher about the story, and he would like to see it. I'll take the manuscript to him myself, if she will trust me with it."

"Ursula's novel! Oh, jolly! *splendid!*" cried out Francie, her eyes fairly dancing with delight. "Trust you — well, I should say so! It's very, *very* kind of you to take it yourself! She will be overjoyed!" Then the two shook hands again in another good-by.

As soon as Ursula was in the house that afternoon, Frances delivered her message; and great was the family rejoicing, for all agreed in Rufie's opinion that the novel had only to be read to be at once accepted.

"Mr. Rose is the kindest man!" exclaimed Ursula. "And he has a good memory, too! Why, it is weeks since I mentioned to him that I was finishing my novel, and I rarely see him at the office; you know we're in different parts of the building. Yet he remembered! Now that it's coming to test, I am very discouraged over my story. I feel as if it were not worth any one's reading. Oh, mother! girls! uncle Gabe! suppose the publisher won't have it, after all the years of writing, of hopes, of fears that I — we all — have put into it! Would n't it be crushing! I should want to run away and hide myself somewhere in a desert!" Ursula actually grew pale at the dismal prospect she had conjured up.

"Don't cross the bridge before you come to it, my dear," advised uncle Gabriel. "You have put of your best into the story; you can't do more than that. Now wait for the publisher's verdict as patiently as you can. And, above all things, *don't* worry. That is an insult to God our Father."

"But the story *is* good! you know it is, Ursa!" cried the girls; and Mrs. Jeffrey's arm stole across Ursula's shoulder, her hand patted Ursula encouragingly.

Frances and Ursula shared the same room, and it was when they were alone in it that night that the "youngest" told her sister about Paul Rose's shortcomings.

To her wonderment Ursula received the news very quietly.

"Why, I thought you would've been so surprised," Francie complained. "You act almost as if you'd known it already."

"Well, I did — in a way," Ursula reluctantly admitted; she was sitting half turned away from Frances, and spoke over her shoulder. "I've seen quite a good deal of Paul lately, he has walked up town with me a number of times," she said. "I encouraged him to do it, to get him out of the company of Harry Legare, one of our editors, who is a friend, a bad friend, of Paul's. Legare has charge of the music and drama department of the Leader. He writes well, and is one of the finest musicians in the city, but a bad lot, for all that! He might have made his mark in the

world, but for his dissipated habits. Every now and then he disappears from the office, is gone a couple or three weeks, on a drunken bout, and then some friend of his does his work for him. Paul is doing it now, going to operas, theatres, concerts, and writing critiques for the Leader. He is doing it well, too, as well as Legare could, I 'm told. But neither Jack nor any of his family know this; he will not tell them."

Ursula turned a little farther round, just a trifle. "There are two sides to the story, Francie, and Paul feels that his family are not treating him well," she continued. "He is above all things a musician; he would like to make music his life profession. And he should, he loves it so; he certainly should. But his father will not hear of such a thing; he intends Paul to be a lawyer and go into his brother Felix's office. The place is all made — ready for him — and Felix would push him ahead. But to make Paul Rose a lawyer would be like trying to put a square peg into a round hole. He is a musician, every fibre of his being is filled with music, he *loves* it! And you have heard his voice?"

"Yes; he has a beautiful voice," agreed Frances soberly. She had not expected Ursula to take Paul's part. "But," she said presently, returning to her charge, "being a musician need n't make him idle in college and fond of — low company."

"No, it need n't," Ursula conceded, sadly, it seemed, to the sharp ears of the young listener. "But, Francie, not every one can bear disappoint-

ment well. Paul likes his own way, which in this instance I truly think would be the best way for him, and because he can't have it, will go no other way. Because he can't make music his profession, he has lost all interest in his studies. He will not exert himself to do credit to his fine mind, or remember the obedience he owes his father. Paul is n't at all a bad fellow, Francie, indeed he is not." Ursula grew earnest. "He has some *fine* traits. But he has got in with a bad set — Legare's set, and they will drag him down if — if — some one does n't save him. They make much of him — those horrid dissipated men! — they flatter Paul, they 'd like to get entire hold of him; make money out of his musical talent, make him as evil as themselves — ruin him, in fact. And then — would *they* care? But they shan't, Francie; they shall *not!*" Ursula sprang up suddenly, and going hurriedly to the closet which she and Frances occupied between them, stood within the door, busying herself with a skirt that hung there.

There was perplexity in Francie's eyes. "Then you 'll say something to him — if you get a chance?" she asked hesitatingly.

Ursula wheeled round and faced her, with moist eyes and a tremulous but smiling mouth. "Yes; we 'll save him; we certainly will save him, if we can," she said warmly.

CHAPTER X

AND SO IT CAME

"RUFIE, do you know that I saw Jim Ivors last evening? Poor fellow! I can't say that he has improved either in looks or manners during the last three months," Judith told her twin one afternoon.

"Oh, did you? Where? Was Marnie with you?" queried Ruth, all interest at once.

The two girls were sitting together; Ruth was sewing, and Judy had laid down her book to speak. In the next room Frances was singing: —

> "And the moon and stars are saying
> To the dreaming forest near,
> 'E'en the nightingale is trilling,
> 'Spring is coming, Spring is here!'
> E'en the nightingale" —

The song finished abruptly, and the "youngest" appeared between the portières which divided the rooms. "What 's that you said about Jim?" she asked eagerly.

"I thought you were warbling of Spring," and, "Well, your ears are sharp enough to hear the grass grow!" exclaimed the twins.

"I can't help hearing things, if I *am* singing," protested Frances. "And you two are not the only ones in the family that are interested in Jim.

What is it about him? Hurry and tell us before Marnie gets home."

"It is n't so very much to tell," Judith said. "You know last evening Basil took Marnie and me to see some pictures. And while we were walking through one of the galleries, whom should we come face to face with but Jim! I was so glad to see him! But he gave us one look, then deliberately turned his back and began talking to a man who stood near him. I expected that, at least, he would 've bowed, and Basil openly expressed his surprise; you see, he does n't know — everything; though he must have noticed that Jim never comes here any more. Perhaps I made a motion to stop — I don't remember; I was so confused for the minute, — but Marnie gripped my arm — 't was like a vise — and fairly pushed me past Jim. Her face got very red, and her head went up; you know that proud way she has. Then presently she said abruptly, 'I 'm going to have another look at that "Portrait of a Lady" by Earncliffe. I think it 's fine! Don't come until you 're ready,' and forthwith marched herself into the east room — one we had already been through. She had no sooner gone — he must have been watching — than Jim came up and spoke to us — asked after mother and you girls and uncle Gabe."

"And what else?" asked Francie, as her sister paused.

"Nothing pleasant," Judy answered soberly. "Jim looks — wretched! You know he never was particular or neat, at his best, and last night he

looked positively unkempt. His hair was untidy, his clothes shabby, and the beard he 's just started gives him a wild gaunt appearance. You remember his kind merry face and how full of fun he was? Well, now he has a fierce expression in his eyes — truly! All because he is so unhappy. He had a good deal to say, in a rough excited way, and he showed us his picture, 'Off the Coast of Maine.' It 's sold, you know: the ticket was on it; and, really, it 's the finest thing he has ever done. People are talking about the picture, and there was always a little crowd around it while we were in the room. Jim pretended to be very gay; he talked very fast, and laughed at nothing. But that did n't deceive me one bit; the louder the poor fellow laughed, the plainer I saw how sore his heart was. I feel *so* sorry for him!"

"Poor Jim!" Frances said softly.

In her deliberate way Ruth laid her work in her lap, folded her slender capable hands, and looked straight at Judy. "*I* think Margaret is acting very queerly," she remarked. "She would n't have Jim, and she would have Mr. Austin, said right out that she cared the most for him — and yet she keeps putting off the wedding. She 's done it twice now. Miss Austin got quite provoked with her about it this morning when she called to take Marnie to Washington Square. Margaret talks a lot about there being so much to be done before she could get married, but that 's just nonsense! She is n't going to have so many clothes — mother could n't afford it — but that we

could have everything ready by the end of April, as Miss Austin wanted. And don't you think," Rufie lowered her voice, and glanced from one to the other of the girls,—"don't you think Marnie 's changed? grown prim and — er — proper? She used to be so jolly — so full of fun — when Jim was coming to see her. Don't you remember?"

"Perhaps she 's cultivating repose of manner, in view of the position she 'll hold in society as Mrs. Roger Austin," suggested Judith slyly. "You 'd better take lessons from her, Rufie," with a mischievous glance at her stately twin; "you know Marnie has l-a-r-g-e plans for our future. Once married, she intends to take us in hand and 'introjuice' us, as Captain Costigan would say, to the dazzling four hundred, of which she will then be a member."

Frances laughed, but Ruth looked blank. "Of course Marnie means it well, but I don't know that I 'd care to go much into society," she said seriously. "You know, people have to dress so much, and we could n't afford that. And 't would be a perfect nuisance to have to be altering one's gowns all the while, as Margaret 's been doing since she 's become so fashionable. The times I 've cleaned and remodeled that yellow waist for her! I could n't stand doing that sort of thing for myself all the time. I suppose she won't like my refusing, but — I don't see anything to laugh at in what I 've said, Judith," she ended, turning on her sister. "You giggle at nothing!"

"I don't wonder Margaret is getting stiff and

prim, as you say," broke in the "youngest" in a most mollifying tone, and hastily suppressing a strong desire to laugh with Judith. "It 's the force of example that 's making her so. Mr. Austin"—none of the girls called Margaret's intended husband by his first name, — "nobody is by to feel hurt at my saying it, is there?" Francie threw a hurried glance over her shoulder — "Mr. Austin is very nice, very refined, very everything that 's elegant, but, oh!" clasping her hands, "*oh!* so utterly wooden — and proper — that he 'd subdue the high spirits of Count Ito or any other irrepressible four-footed animal, to say nothing of a sensitive human being. I should die or become idiotic, if I had always to live with him. Would n't Marnie feel dreadfully if she heard me!" Frances tried to look contrite.

"Yes, I know — I know," Judy nodded, with quick comprehension. "And I think Marnie does feel it. The other day, after he 'd gone — he had been here over an hour — she came into our room, and positively, she looked bored! Do you remember, Ruth? you were there. Marnie put her arms up over her head and just yawned. I could n't resist it; I said, 'Don't you want to do something wild as a relief, scream, or stand on your head, or turn a somersault?' She got as red! She 'caught on,' as poor Jim used to say, gave me a withering glance, and sailed out of the room, all offended dignity."

"Oh, was *that* what you meant? I wondered at your saying it," cried Ruth.

"What! only got it now? Well, some people have to have things hammered into their heads!" declared Judy, falling back in her chair as if exhausted.

"I don't pretend to be as smart as you are — or as conceited, either," retorted Ruth indignantly; then the next moment she almost melted into tears. "I should think you'd be *ashamed* of yourself, Judith Jeffrey, to say such mean unkind things to your own twin sister! *I* would never treat you in such a way."

Judy walked over and calmly seated herself on Ruth's lap, put a finger under that young person's chin, and turned her face up into full view. "Oh, no, you poor, innocent, injured lamb! You 'd never call names — 'conceited' is n't anything, I suppose," she remarked, shaking a finger within an inch of Rufie's classical nose. "*My* poor feelings are of small account."

"But you don't care, and I do," whispered Ruth, still inclined to be tearful. "I know you 've more brains than I, but I can't help it; I did n't make myself."

"Now, Rufie! just stop saying such silly things! You know very well you 're *twice* as capable as I am," cried the other girl warmly, wishing she had not made her saucy speech. "What can I do that you can't? — strum a little on the banjo and visit my poor people; where do the brains come in there, I 'd like to know? Mother always says that you and Francie are her capable children; I 'm afraid you 're fishing for compliments, young woman."

"Indeed, I'm not," earnestly protested the accused; "I'd much rather be like you," which humble confession sent Judy's arms around her twin, her head nestling into Rufie's neck.

"Two old spoonies!" teased Frances. "Well, I suppose I might as well go back to my practicing. Oh, here is uncle Gabe! Your rivirence looks as pleased as if you had good news," she declared, dancing up to the bright-faced little gentleman. "I know — I know!" clapping her hands softly, her head on one side, like some saucy, inquisitive bird. "Girls, he 's been called to the parish of Enfield. You 've got your parish, sir, eh?"

A shadow flitted across Mr. Kincaid's face and was quickly gone. "No, no, you 're mistaken; another man is going to Enfield," he said hastily. "I stopped at Brenton's book-shop on my way up town. A good many of the clergy drop in there, and one can generally get an idea of what 's going on. And there I heard that Patterson has been called to Enfield."

"Oh, uncle Gabe!" cried out the three girls, deeply disappointed.

"Well — er — of course I 'd have been very glad to take the parish," observed the reverend gentleman quickly, and in rather embarrassed fashion, "but — well, really they might have done worse than get Patterson. He is a very fine young fellow — very fine! Bright, up-to-date; and he knows how to preach, too."

Judith had been eyeing Mr. Kincaid intently.

"Uncle Gabriel! I do believe *you* 've had a hand in putting him there!" she cried out, in sudden suspicion.

"Why — what makes you — eh! — my dears," stammered the little man, stepping back; and in embarrassment scratching his head so violently as to send the skull-cap careering wildly over the slippery surface of his bald pate.

"Now, sir, there 's *no* use in rumpling your locks and trying to look as if we 'd maligned you," Frances informed him, saucy, but anxious to know the truth. "You 'd better tell us. We 'll be sure to hear it from somebody or other, and why not from you, at first hand?"

And recognizing the force of her argument, Mr. Kincaid proceeded to impart the desired information. Waving a chair aside, with hands in his pockets he humped his narrow shoulders comfortably against the side of the door. "Well," he began, "a few days after I 'd preached at St. Mark's, at Enfield, I met Graves — you know, Judy, the senior warden, who was so attentive to us; met him down near my river office. He stopped, and we chatted awhile. 'That was a very fine sermon of yours last Sunday, doctor,' Graves said, — he knows I 'm not a D. D.; but he will call me 'doctor,'" uncle Gabriel explained, — "'one of the best sermons we 've had. In fact, there 's only one other, of all the sermons that 've been preached for us since our rector died, that comes up to yours.' That was what Graves told me. Very gratifying — eh, my dears? Ha! ha!"

Uncle Gabe threw a bright glance at his audience, and cheerfully jingled his keys.

"I told you 't was a good sermon," Judy reminded him.

"Well, then, why" — questioned Ruth, but paused.

"So you did," remarked Mr. Kincaid, ignoring Rufie's unfinished sentence. "Graves said some other things, equally complimentary. I really think he is a man of a good deal of discrimination;" the keys jingled again. "Just as we were parting he said, 'Oh, by the way, d' you know anything of the Reverend Arthur Patterson? What sort of a man is he?'"

"Oh, the mean, deceitful creature! Oh, the serpent!" cried Francie wrathfully.

Uncle Gabriel regarded her with surprise. "Why, Frances!" he remonstrated; then continued, "As it happened, I knew several things about Patterson, all good. And, of course, I proceeded to tell them. It was n't until some time after Graves had left me, not until I was walking up town in the afternoon, that it occurred to me that maybe Patterson was the other man, whose sermon came up to mine. I 'm very glad I did n't think of it sooner," the little gentleman said simply, "because, though, of course, I should have said just the same things that I did say, still, human nature is weak, you know, my dears, and I *might* not 've been able to put such genuine warmth into my praise of Patterson. And that would 've been an injustice to him."

"Very likely what you said, with his good sermon, got Mr. Patterson to St. Mark's," observed Judith.

"I don't care what anybody says — that Graves was a sly mean thing! Why, under the circumstances, 't was adding insult to injury to come to you for information about Mr. Patterson," declared Francie; and Ruth chimed in with such an impressive, solemn, "Yes, uncle Gabe, *I* think so, too," as nearly set Judy laughing.

"Well — I don't know," Mr. Kincaid said reflectively; from force of habit his hand went up and stroked his shaven chin. "I 'd have liked well enough to have that parish, I 'd have carried those people on my heart; but if it is n't for me — and, you know, a Higher Power than that of man settles these matters — if it is n't for me, why, it 's very pleasant to think that perhaps I 've had a hand in putting a fine young fellow into a field of work where he can do his best. And he needs it, girls; Patterson was in a pretty tight place. Just out of the Seminary, no funds, and with a mother, a confirmed invalid, to support! Yes," jingling his keys merrily, "I 'm honestly glad the poor fellow has got St. Mark's."

"Was it rejoicing over Mr. Patterson's good fortune that made you look so pleased?" inquired Judy. "We thought you had something nice to tell us."

"Well, Jared 's got a good situation, at last; an excellent place, out West. He goes to fill it in a week or two, and earlier, if — if a certain

matter can be arranged," Mr. Kincaid announced, with great satisfaction. He thought it wise not to explain that the "certain matter" referred to was the finding on his part and advancing to his protégé of a sum of money sufficient for traveling expenses to the Western city.

"Goodness! that must be the 'forty eleventh' situation he 's had since you 've known him!" cried Frances.

"I think he 's lazy!" declared Judith.

"Oh, no, my dear, you 're very much mistaken," replied the little gentleman, with decision. "Jared is very anxious to keep at work, but he has been most unfortunate, so far. This new opening, however, promises well. I only hope that I — I hope," hastily correcting himself, "that we can arrange for him to go out West. I wish he was n't quite so large — or I so small," added Mr. Kincaid, under his breath, with Jared's ever scanty wardrobe before his mind's eye.

Just then came an interruption, one of the tragic interruptions that sometimes claim us in a tranquil, most unexpected hour.

A violent ring of the bell echoed through the apartment, and before Ruth could reach the door Gretchen stood there, awaiting her young mistress, with eyes that looked rounder than ever, and inexpressible excitement in her broken sentences. "Miss Youdit' — li'l' boy — kill!"

"What 's that?" cried Judy, appearing at the sound of her name; and all the little party surged out into the narrow hall to hear what the frightened woman at the door had to tell.

She was bareheaded, and over her shoulders was thrown a little shawl, under which she tried vainly to hide her large bare arms, her sleeves being rolled well above her elbows. "Oi was at me washin', miss, — you 'll plaze to *excuse* me," she said breathlessly, tugging at her sleeves. "Oi rin loike a deer when the pore mother axed me! It 's li'l' Johnnie Quayle, miss, — he 's run over wid them horse-cyars. Yes, sor, t'ree blocks down an' two across. It 's meself don' know if he 's kilt. Only he 's callin' for yese, miss; an' the pore mother 's that crazy" —

"Rufie, tell mother when she comes in. Come with me, uncle Gabe, will you? Yes, I 'm ready," cried Judith, tossing on a hat, and slipping into her coat, buttoning it as she ran down the steps.

"'T is the laidy he 's been callin' for," "Sure, 't is Miss Judit' an' the li'l' parson," cried several in the crowd that had gathered around the injured boy, and a way was instantly made, through which Judith and uncle Gabriel passed.

Johnnie had been carried into the area-way of a house that, many years ago, had been the home of a city magnate; the space allowed for a front yard was more generous than that of its neighbors. That space was now occupied by as many of the crowd as could squeeze into it, their attention divided between the little boy's fainting mother and her son; and on the wide area step sat a woman holding the child across her lap. In him Judith scarcely recognized the robust, rough, independent little chap, to whom on visits to his

mother she had given pennies for treats, and whose chubby freckled face she had so often patted. Suffering and intense excitement had flushed Johnnie's cheeks a dull crimson, deepened his blue eyes into brilliant, tearless black, and painted under them and around his temples heavy purple shadows that, for the time, changed and spiritualized into startling beauty the commonplace little face.

Full grown for his four short years of life, the boy more than filled the capacious lap on which he lay, with arms thrown wide apart, and his head hanging over backward, so that he surveyed the crowd upside down. One sturdy leg — in a shabby, buttonless shoe, and a torn stocking that gave a liberal view of a brown plump little knee — worked incessantly up and down, the other, limp and crushed, — the car wheel had gone over it, — was supported by friendly hands, and covered with a light cloth.

A look of recognition came into Johnnie's eyes as Judith sank down beside him on the step and gently lifted his head. The constant pitiful "A-a-h! A-a-h!" half moan, half cry, that issued from his parted scarlet lips ceased for the space of one long, indrawn, sobbing breath, then, wriggling his head back into its former position, Johnnie again took up his cry.

"Is there no doctor here? Oh, why wait for the ambulance? Oh, uncle Gabriel, do get a doctor!" entreated Judith.

But uncle Gabriel was beside the poor mother.

Some one had long ago handed a chair over the railing of the next stoop, and on this was supported Johnnie's mother, half fainting, yet garrulous with nervousness and grief. The car had come to a stand; the horses, no doubt glad of the rest, flung sidelong, inquisitive glances at the crowd and rubbed noses; the conductor held the reins, and over the area railing, side by side with a big policeman, hung the driver, white-faced, anxious, and remorseful — he had little ones of his own at home.

"It ain't my fault — I swear it ain't. I 'd 'a' give my right han' sooner 'n have this happen," he earnestly protested. "He 's a daring young un — that boy! Day after day when I 'm passin' he 'll run out a'most under the horses' feet, then race off an' stan' jeerin'. To-day he done it once too often — his foot slip, an' 'fore I could help it, though God knows I mos' jammed that brake off tryin' to stop, there he was, under the w'eel! 'T ain't my fault, I tell you — the children had ought to be kep' off the streets."

"Kep' off the streets!" cried out Johnnie's mother shrilly; dashing the tears from her face, she sat up to answer him. "Kep' off the streets, is it? Jes' lemme see youse do it! Six child'en in two li'l' rooms, an' me washin' an' ironin' for a livin', wid clo'es lyin' roun' an' cookin' goin' on; six quar'lin', squirmin' young ones underfoot from mornin' to night — jes' youse try it. Oh, youse men can talk, but wese women knows! An', anny way, ain't child'en got a right to breathe

the fresh air? Ye cyan' keep 'em cooped up *all* the time; an' there ain't no place roun' here for 'em to play 'cep' the street. An', now," falling back with a wild burst of tears,—"now youse has knock the life out of 'im — me Johnnie — me foine li'l' b'y — the best of the whole six! 'T was he was allays bringin' me the kindlin's he 'd be pickin' up, an' the li'l' bit er coal. Allays thinkin' of his mother, Johnnie was. Sez he to me, this blessed mornin'," — tearfully addressing the bystanders, who listened in respectful, sympathetic silence, — "sez 'e — watchin' me scrubbin' to the wash-tubs — sez 'e, 'Mama, w'en I 'm a big man, I 'll tek care er you — youse shan' wurk so hard.' That 's the very wurds he says, 'Mama, I 'll tek care er you,' and now he 's gone — he 's gone! An' what 'll Tim Quayle be sayin' to me — Johnnie 's the one of all the child'en he set most store by. O-o-w! O-o-w!" Throwing her apron over her face, Mrs. Quayle wept loudly, with Johnnie's reversed vision fixed upon her, his moaning "A-a-h!" sounding in her ears.

"Don't give up hope, my friend," kindly urged uncle Gabriel. "We don't yet know the extent of your little boy's injuries; let us hope they may be less serious than you think. At any rate, he still lives; for that we should be thankful."

"An' 't is thankful I am to yese for yer kind wurds, sor," came in muffled accents from behind the apron. "An' Miss Judit' was allays that good — it 's Johnnie 'll be glad she 's wid 'im."

The ambulance came dashing round the corner, and an alert young doctor sprang to the ground

and made his way to where Johnnie lay. There he found a medical man already on the spot.

While uncle Gabriel was endeavoring to soothe and comfort Mrs. Quayle, and while Judith knelt beside Johnnie, wiping the moisture of pain from his cold forehead, patting his chubby hand, and whispering caressing words into his apparently heedless ear, a tall girl and two men had come into the crowded area and joined her.

"Oh, Marnie! is n't it dreadful for the little fellow!" Judith said, in a hurried undertone, to the girl; then turning eagerly to one of the men, a dependent, imploring note in her voice that delighted her hearer, "Oh, Basil, *you* 'll get a doctor — won't you?" she asked. "The ambulance is so long in coming, and the poor child is suffering agony."

"I 'll get one, sure! He 'll be here in a jiffy!" replied the new cousin confidently; and dashed away as fast as the pressure of people around him would allow, unheeding Mr. Austin's hastily uttered, "Give him any price — only bring him!"

While walking leisurely toward the Jeffreys' house, Mr. Austin and Margaret had been accosted by a small urchin (one of Judy's "boys") and given a vivid account of the accident and Judy's presence there, which sent them, and Basil, who came along at the moment, a good deal out of their way and directly to the area gate.

In the few moments of Basil's absence — they seemed very long — Roger Austin, standing looking intently upon two figures that were before him,

was stirred by a strong and most unusual emotion. The chief figure was Margaret, kneeling beside Johnnie, her sailor hat pushed back, well off her head, her brilliant eyes soft with unshed tears, her beautiful face full of tender pity as she stroked the grimy little hand spread out upon her palm. Once she bent and laid the clammy fingers against her glowing cheek, and in the thrill of a swift vision that came to him — a hitherto unthought of joy — Roger, for the first time in his life, recognized the unbreakable common brotherhood of man, and an intention which for weeks had been floating vaguely in the back of his brain suddenly crystallized itself into a fixed, generous resolve.

Though hardly in the fraction of time that he had stipulated, Basil, nevertheless, speedily brought a physician, to whose practiced eye the extent of Johnnie's injuries was soon apparent.

Judy's lips quivered when his report was whispered to her. She hastily retreated under the basement archway, and put her hands over her face. "Oh, poor little Johnnie! your romping, active days are over!" she cried. Then turning impulsively to the person who had followed her steps, and whom intuitively she knew to be Basil, "Oh, is n't it hard that he should have to be a cripple for life," she said huskily, "because there are not enough places provided for poor children in New York, — not enough safe playgrounds for them in this great city of rich men and women! Oh, it is *cruel!*" Judy's hand clinched, her voice shook. "Of course he was on the street — where else was he to go to

play? Is it natural to expect a healthy, active child, full of mischief, to stay all day shut up in one stuffy room? the Quayles' other 'room,' as they call it, is nothing but a good-sized dark closet where as many of them as can sleep. Is it natural to expect Johnnie to stay indoors, in a room full to overflowing with crying children, wash-tubs, wet clothes hanging in every direction, when the street, large, free, and airy is open to him? It 's only human to seek light and air and exercise — all animals crave it; and because no allowance was made for Johnnie's humanity, he is now suffering — may die; or if he live, be a poor lame creature all the rest of his days. This," she threw a hand over her shoulder in the direction of Johnnie, — " this accident is n't God's doing; it 's man's *not* doing — his sin of omission. If you had known the little fellow in health — perpetual motion, almost — you 'd realize, as I do, what this lameness will be to him — if he live!" Judith leaned her head against the wall, and several tears ran down from under the hands that sought to conceal them.

"'*Tis* hard lines on the little chap," Basil said thoughtfully; a great tenderness was in the light blue eyes that gazed so steadily at Judy. "Don't cry, Judy, — don't!" he urged presently, laying his hand on her arm; there was almost a sharpness in his voice, but Judith took no offense. "I — I can't stand seeing you cry. Perhaps you 'll get your playground some day. Ah!" in a tone of relief, "here 's the ambulance at last!"

Upon the arrival of the brisk young doctor, and his report, imparted with business-like brevity, Mrs. Quayle suddenly gathered strength. Putting aside the glass of water and other restoratives that had been offered her, she rose to her feet. She considered that the time for action had come, and proved herself equal to it. "If it 's to horspittle he 's goin', I 'm goin' wid 'im," she announced, with a certain dignity of manner, spite of her swollen eyes and broad tear-blurred visage.

"You won't gain anything by going now — you won't be allowed in the ward. Better come in the morning; better for him and for you, too," replied the young doctor shortly.

"It 's now I 'm goin' — wid 'im," repeated Mrs. Quayle firmly. "He ain't nothin' but a baby; an' I 'll be holdin' 'im. Then I 'll be knowin' what all the doctors 'd be sayin' of me b'y. D' ye s'pose," her voice rose passionately, "that I 'd be facin' Tim Quayle widout that? The other child'en 'll have to git on 'thout me" —

"Sure I 'll be lookin' afther the child'en," and "Don't yese be worryin' 'bout them — we 'll be carin' for 'em," broke in kindly neighbors of Johnnie's mother, neighbors who through sympathy — and a share of curiosity — had left their work, and, some of them, come many blocks to be with her.

"Hear her considerin' Tim Quayle, an' he, the lazy oidlin' feller, forever hangin' roun' the docks, doin' nothin', an' she workin' like a horse to keep the roof over him an' the child'en," commented some other neighbors.

Unconscious of these last remarks, Mrs. Quayle accepted one of the offers to look after her children in her absence. "I'll be doin' as much, an' more, fer yese, Mrs. Brady, whin your toime of throuble comes," she declared, with warmth. "An' it's the dinner ye 'll be findin' set on the back er the stove," she added. "Will yer plaze to be tellin' Tim I'll be home whin he sees me, an' not before. The Howly Mother an' all the saints bless ye, Miss Judit'," as the girl came close and pressed her hard work-worn hand. "It's the friend of the poor ye are, an' no mistake."

With sustained dignity Mrs. Quayle walked to the ambulance, into which uncle Gabriel assisted her; then Johnnie was handed in, quiet enough now; the young doctor had given him a hypodermic of morphine.

"O-o-w! me li'l' Johnnie! O-o-w! Mavourneen, mavourneen, 't is loike the dead ye look!" cried the poor mother, bursting into a paroxysm of tears as she received the round quiet little figure into her arms.

"Now, see here — I can't have that noise; you 've got to be quiet," commanded the hospital doctor, at which a murmur of disapproval ran through the crowd. The young physician sprang to his seat, gave the signal, and the ambulance went swiftly up the avenue and out of sight.

The party of five walked in almost unbroken silence to the Jeffreys' home. Ruth admitted them to the drawing-room, where were Mrs. Jef-

frey, Frances, and Ursula, with many questions as to their absence.

"When it got to be long past tea time and none of you put in an appearance, I grew nervous," the mother said. "The whole affair was so hurried that Ruth and Francie could tell very little of what had carried you two off," — nodding at uncle Gabe and Judith, the last of whom sat white and heavy-eyed, — "and Margaret's absence added to my anxiety."

Then the story was related by the girls and uncle Gabriel, the other two men supplying a word here and there as the tale progressed. Judith told her part with feeling, but quietly and apparently with perfect self-control, until nearly at the end; and then, without warning, she sprang up, leaving a sentence unfinished. "I can't go on," she explained, with shaking lips, spite of a desperate effort to keep them steady. "I think — I 'm tired. Marnie, you tell the rest."

She turned hastily to leave the room, when, to the surprise of all, Mr. Austin made a detaining gesture. "Don't go just yet, Judith," he asked. "I 've something to say to you presently."

Then, when Margaret had brought the sad story to a close, Roger rose from his chair, and taking a step forward, addressed Judith. "You have more than once spoken to me of a cherished scheme you have in mind and are most desirous of having carried out," he said. There was an earnest ring in his voice, and such a curious, restrained excitement in his usually calm manner as immedi-

ately secured the attention of the small audience. "Your idea, as I understand it, is that there should be more public playgrounds for the poor children of this city, and right in the heart of the city. You maintain that such places would be for their great gain, — a gain both of body and soul, I think you said. After carefully considering the idea, I will say now that I agree with you. And as a practical proof of my belief in the good such a playground would be on this crowded East Side, I am prepared to give for that purpose three lots of ground which I now own." He paused, for Margaret had risen and come swiftly to his side.

"Oh, Roger, how kind you are!" she exclaimed, and impulsively took one of his hands in hers.

Uncle Gabriel and Margaret's lover had not been drawn toward each other. In the inner recesses of his mind Mr. Austin regarded the little clergyman as but one remove from a fool, and, in the exercise of his philanthropy, detrimental to the Jeffreys; while uncle Gabe's private opinion of his future nephew-in-law was that he was dull, cold-hearted, and worldly. But now the little man quite forgot his prejudice in admiration of Roger's generosity.

"That 's a noble gift, sir, a noble gift — one that does you credit!" he declared warmly. "I envy you the ability to give so generously. It is a great privilege, for" — uncle Gabriel's hand was lifted — "'He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord.'"

At Mr. Austin's unexpected words Judy had

risen quickly to her feet, with the color flaming in a soft red streak on each cheek, wide-eyed and bewildered. "Mother, Ursula — do you suppose he means it? Is it true? Oh! is it *really* true?" she asked imploringly, incredulously, doubting the evidence of her own ears.

"Oh, how generous!" "How kind!" came from various ones in the little audience.

With a rare public demonstration of affection Mr. Austin drew Margaret's hand within his arm and gently patted it; and with her standing beside him, continued his remarks. He was realizing in a larger, fuller degree than ever before in all his life the beauty and joy of giving.

"Yes, it is quite true," he said, smiling at Judith; his eyes were bright, and a tinge of color had come into his anæmic face. "The lots are situated in a closely populated district of the East Side, and, at present, are occupied by houses; but they shall be pulled down. And as the space of the three lots, put together, is not enough for your purpose, we must see what we can do to make it larger. I 'll lay the matter before some men, and try and get them interested. It is possible — of course, you understand that I am not speaking with any certainty whatever — but it is possible that they may be induced to coöperate, and so enable us to carry out the scheme" —

"Ay!" shouted Basil, jumping to his feet and slapping his hand violently on his pocket; then meeting the surprised eyes that turned upon him, he sank back in his chair and scowled fiercely, with a

sulky expression on his face that seemed to say, "Don't anybody dare to tell me I said that!"

By this time Judith had reached Roger's side, and was clasping his hand firmly with her eager, nervous fingers. "Oh, God will bless you for this splendid gift!" she cried; she could scarcely speak. "I can't thank you, my heart is so full that the words won't come. Thank him for me, Marnie! Mother, Ursula, tell him what a great, *great* boon this playground will be, what a *blessing* to the children! They will have a right there; there they can play without being in anybody's way, without danger of being knocked down, run over, as Johnnie" — Dropping Mr. Austin's hand Judy ran to her mother, and slipping to her knees, buried her face in that lady's shoulder. "Oh, mother! mother! — I am so glad, I am *so* glad!" she declared, and, by way of proving it, burst into a passion of tears which even Mrs. Jeffrey's tender touch, her soothing voice, could not immediately check.

"Good-by!" a voice whispered presently into Judy's ear.

The voice came from somewhere back of the spindle chair, and belonged to Basil Fabrey.

Judith lifted her face, still wet with tears; pale, tired, heavy-eyed, but calm, save for a slight trembling of the under lip when she spoke. "I 'm ashamed to have broken down under such splendid news — just what I 've been longing for. I don't know what ails me to-day; you 'll think me a regular cry-baby!" she said deprecatingly.

Basil went down on one knee to be on a level with her, and their eyes met. Then, rosy red from chin to forehead, Judy hastily put her face again upon her mother's shoulder, and, shielded from public view behind the high back of the spindle chair, Basil stooped still lower and quietly kissed the hand she had held out for good-by. The next minute, making short work of his adieux to the rest of the family, he was rushing down the steps in hot pursuit of Mr. Austin, who had preceded him.

"Oh, I say! Austin, hold on!" Basil shouted; and on reaching that dignified gentleman thrust a hand familiarly through his arm. "I want to talk to you about that playground business," he remarked, somewhat out of breath with his late exertions. "I know of one 'bloated capitalist' that wants to drop some cash in just such a scheme. I 'll walk a block or two with you and explain."

CHAPTER XI

JARED

THE family were out — Ursula and Frances spending the evening with the Ervengs; Mrs. Jeffrey and the other three girls dining in Washington Square. So it happened that uncle Gabriel was quite alone when Jared Watkins called. In the kitchen Gretchen was poring over a German paper that Mr. Kincaid had given her. After a very juvenile frolic Count Ito was asleep in his basket under the table, and on the fire-escape outside the kitchen window, with her tail close wrapped around her dainty white paws, was Miss Weewee, taking the air, and, under the guise of meditation, casting inquisitive glances into her neighbors' back windows. At the flat-topped desk in the dining-room sat uncle Gabriel, writing by the fast fading light of a late April afternoon. The article was for the next number of the Italian paper, the subject Garibaldi, — a hero dear to the little man's heart, — and his pen was traveling over the pages of his pad with genuine enjoyment. Yet he heard and recognized the stealthy knock at the front door, and immediately rose to answer it.

"That 's all right, Gretchen, you need n't trouble to go to the door," he called, with characteristic

consideration, and in German. "It 's some one for me; I 'll let him in," and hastened to admit his protégé.

"Ah, good-evening, Jared! Glad to see you!" he said heartily. "Come in, my friend, walk right in. I 'll take you to my room to have our talk. It 's pretty small — should n't wonder if we two big men 'd be rather crowded. Ha! ha! But we 'll manage somehow. Tell you what, you can sit on the bed, and I 'll hang my feet out of the window. That 'll give more space — eh? Ha! ha! This way, Jared!"

Mr. Kincaid took the lead, turning up the light for the visitor to see his way across the drawing-room. It was Jared's first admittance within the flat, and he followed his patron leisurely, as he went casting, from under beetling brows, glances sly but sharp to right and left; glances which, by the time he reached uncle Gabriel's bedroom, had fixed in the protégé's mind the exact location of the few articles of value in the little parlor.

"Take a seat, Jared; this chair 's about the only one here that would bear such a heavy weight as you. Light weights may not be imposing, perhaps, but I 've found one advantage they possess," — the little man's eyes were twinkling behind his glasses; he was in good spirits this evening, — "they agree better with old, infirm furniture than do you heavy people. Ha! ha! This would n't hold you — I 'm perfectly safe in it," as he spoke, twisting round a weak-backed revolving chair, which had lost its thread and wobbled aimlessly from side to side.

Mr. Kincaid confidently seated himself in it. "Little place, but cosy — is n't it?" he asked. A comprehensive wave of the hand indicated his small domain.

Having settled his huge bulk to his satisfaction, and placed on the floor beside his chair a dirty-looking carpet-bag which he had carried, Jared was now letting his shrewd eyes wander around his friend's bedroom. It was cosy, in its arrangement showing evidence of a woman's touch and thought, but, save for the fine copy of Andrea del Sarto's head of Christ which hung upon the wall, and for Mr. Kincaid's new spring overcoat which lay over the foot-rail of the bed, everything in the apartment was of the simplest, and indeed shabby. The picture had been presented to uncle Gabriel years ago; the overcoat had come in rather an unusual way — in payment of a piece of writing from a clothier who was short of ready cash. From the same source and on the same terms had come the new suit of clothes in which the protégé was now arrayed.

Jared appraised the furnishings at a very low figure, but the comfort which they represented appealed directly to him and embittered his soul.

"You 're fine an' comfortable. What more d's a man want 'n something to eat an' drink an' a place to sleep?" he said; he had a rough, abrupt manner. His tone grew querulous. "This 'd be a palice — a palice — to me!" he declared. "You 'd ought to see where *I* slep' las' night! — a shelf 'gainst the wall, an' two of us on it at that. Guess

there was more 'n two ; " this grimly, and with a reminiscent scratch of his upper arm.

" Why, how 's that ? I gave you — er — I told you to get sleeping accommodation at the Mills Building," Mr. Kincaid exclaimed, in surprise.

Jared started, and hastened to retrieve his mistake. " You did gi' me some money, parson ; you 're the best — and — only — friend — I 've got — in the world ! " he asserted, with a sidelong, emphatic movement of his brawny hand. " You 've been a friend to me when everybody else 'd turned the cold shoulder. You did gi' me money yesterday for a Mills bed, an' it was my intention to 've gone there, but, parson, I ain't an angel, an' I ain't dead, consequently I had to eat. An' by the time I 'd satisfied myself an' " — here he dropped his voice and tried to look modest, with a shrewd eye on his audience, — " an' given a bite to a poor wretch as bad off as myself, there were n't much left ; not more 'n enough to get a shelf in one of them sleepin'-hells along the river-side. 'T ain't your fault, parson — it 's all mine. I 'd no business to be givin' a meal to that man with the money you gi' me for another purpose. Oh, I know it — I know it," waving his hands at the distressed little clergyman, who was trying vainly to interrupt his protégé's flow of words. " But I 've got a heart, parson — a heart, sir — if I am a bad lot, an' I 'd 've slep' on that shelf every night in the week ruther 'n refuse a meal to that onfortunate creature." He paused, with an air of being overcome by his feelings.

"Why, certainly, Jared, certainly!" exclaimed Mr. Kincaid eagerly. He put out his thin hand and patted the other man's broad shoulder. "My friend, *I* would never be the one to blame you for such an unselfish piece of kindness," he said. "I 've always felt that you had a good heart, Jared. And there 'll be no more sleeping on a shelf against the wall for you — let us thank a merciful Heavenly Father for that, Jared! No more being hungry, with an empty pocket, and without a home. This opening in Denver is full of promise — *fu-l-l* of promise! There you 'll be able to put the old unhappy past entirely behind you — bury it, in fact, and with God's help make a new name for yourself, a new and honorable name, my friend. It 's an excellent opening in Denver, and I *know* you 'll make good use of it, Jared. I expect great things of you in this new situation — great things! Don't you forget that." Uncle Gabriel's bright face beamed with kindness, his voice rang hopefully.

But the little red eyes under Jared's sullen brows were filled with an ugly light. "'A new life!'" he cried out roughly, almost fiercely. "I tell you, there ain't no new life for me. I 've gone wrong — I 'm a jail-bird — an' that settles it! Down in the gutter I 'm to stay — where I belong. Don't say a word, parson: that 's just the way it stands. There 's no gettin' up in the world again for me — God won' help me, an' man won' let me." Jared was in downright earnest now. "I tell you that 's *true!*" He brought his first down on the little table

near him with an unexpected bang that made Mr. Kincaid jump. "Anderson said he 'd gi' me — I mean len' me half the money to get to Denver. To-night I went to him for it, all ready to start," motioning to the carpet-bag beside him, "as the train goes at midnight. I went to him for the money he 'd promised — what 's he tell me? He ain't got no money to lend — he can't spare it! That 's all. Yes, *sir*, — says he — can't do it! Lyin' cheat! Interested in me? Bah! I tell you, parson, he don' care a Go— "

"Jared! Jared! — no swearing!" broke in Mr. Kincaid firmly, barely in time to arrest the oath that trembled on his protégé 's lips.

Jared glared, then dropped his head; a little whine came into his voice. "I ask your pardon, sir, — hope you 'll forgive me. It 's the bad company I used to keep that 's learned me them ways. But I 'm tryin' to do different — since I 've known you. 'T ain't easy, but I 'm tryin'; you 're my best friend, parson; you won' be hard on a poor feller?"

"I do believe that you 're striving to be a better man, that you 've turned from the evil ways, and are seeking after God. Yes, Jared, I believe that," Mr. Kincaid said kindly, instantly mollified. "And I 'll never be hard upon you, my friend, never, of that you may be sure. For I know by my own experience that even with the strongest resolution, it is often far from easy to overcome the old Adam within us." The near-sighted, unsuspicious little gentleman failed to notice the expression, half

amusement, half contemptuous, that contorted Jared's mouth at his remark, and to conceal which he coughed behind his hand.

"And now I 'll tell you something pleasant," uncle Gabriel continued gayly, — "something very pleasant! It 's a pity Anderson has dropped out; but it 's his loss as much as yours, Jared, for it is a *great* privilege to be able to help a fellow creature to stand once more upon his own feet. A man who knew what he was talking about says that 'Liberty is that place in life in which we can do our best.' This place in Denver is going to be liberty to you, Jared, for you will be free to do your best in it, — free from the evil associates that sometimes tempt you here, and with your past a dead past, indeed. Those who meet you out there will know you only as you show yourself — an honest man, as I firmly believe you now to be, and deserving of respect. At your very best you will be out there, with God's help, — your best of body, mind, and soul. See? Why, Jared, you may yet rise to be one of the firm. I expect it of you — nothing less! Ha! ha!"

Pulling open the top drawer of his chiffonier — it was never locked — Mr. Kincaid took out a pocket-book. Its once smooth surface was scratched and worn with the service of years, its form limp and flat, and from among its musty folds Jared's patron drew a roll of bills. By the provision of a friend — long dead — uncle Gabriel, twice a year, received a small sum of money. Its expenditure should have added to his personal comfort and

lightened the pecuniary cares which sometimes pressed heavily upon him; but it was mainly spent in giving aid to the suffering poor that came to him for help. Now, separating one bill (it was all the cash that he expected to own for weeks to come) from the roll, the little gentleman laid it away in the pocket-book, then turned to Jared with a happy countenance.

"From a chance remark of Anderson's yesterday, I feared that he might back out at the last moment," uncle Gabriel said. "So I prepared for such an emergency — I was *determined* you should have this chance, Jared! On my way up town this afternoon I called upon a man I know, and made an arrangement with him to do some work. He 's been after me for some time to take it, but it 's work on a dictionary and — eh — rather confining, with my other indoor labors, — editing those papers, I mean, — so I 'd fought rather shy of the job. My friend agreed at once, and I got him to advance me some money on my future work. That is in here," he motioned to the roll of bills, "and as well a small amount which comes to me semi-annually. Altogether there 's enough to take you to Denver, Jared, and to allow you a little over for meals on the cars, and for a bite when you get to your journey's end. As you say, not being an angel or dead, you must eat. Ha! ha! Pretty good for you, Jared! Now, see." Mr. Kincaid began counting the money out on the little table near which sat his protégé.

"It was my intention to go to the station with

you," he continued, shedding the bills from his fingers with the slow awkward touch of one unaccustomed to such handling. "But your train goes at midnight, and I've an article to finish for my Italian paper, and some proofs to correct, dictionary proofs — I began work right away — that must be given in to-morrow morning, and it 'll take — well — most of the night to get it all finished. Else I certainly would go up with you" —

At sight of the money a hard glittering light had sprung into Jared's ferret eyes, a greed that set his heavy mouth twitching. The big fingers spread upon his knees worked with longing, and, before uncle Gabriel had well finished his count, they were outstretched and had closed hungrily upon the bills. "*God* bless you, parson!" he exclaimed breathlessly. He brought the two fistfuls of money together and held them extended before his almost incredulous eyes. "I ain't seen so much — for years — years — years!" he said thickly. With trembling fingers he shook the bills into an even pile and laid them lovingly away in a dilapidated wallet which he produced from some remote pocket. Then he lifted his huge figure erect and faced his patron. "There 's nobody been so good to me since I was born as you 've been," he declared, with an unusual, and genuine, earnestness in his voice. "I ain't had any too much of such treatment; mostly it 's been kicks an' cuffs an' hard words. If I 'd met you years agone, maybe I 'd been a better man! Parson, you 're the right sort — you are! God bless you!" He wrung

uncle Gabriel's hand, and the little man patted him on the arm with the other hand.

"If you could know the great pleasure it gives me to do this for you, Jared!" he said, beaming affectionately upon his protégé. "All I ask is that you keep straight, and make a new, honest name for yourself in Denver. That 's all I ask. And, perhaps, out there, one of these days, you 'll have opportunity to pass along to others in trouble some of what you call my 'kindnesses' to you — asking them to pass it on to some one else. Eh, friend? In that way one can do a good deal of book-keeping without having a very long pocket. Was n't it Benjamin Franklin said something like that? Wise old Ben! I am very sorry I can't go to the station with you, Jared; I 'd like so much to 've seen you off. Let me see — I wonder if I could?" he finished, with a questioning glance at the table where lay a bundle of proofs waiting to be revised.

Jared scowled heavily. "Is it 'cause you don' trust me, parson, that you 'd be goin' along?" he asked, in an injured, sulky tone. "You 've got your writin' to do, an' the Lord knows — goodness knows," he hastily corrected himself at Mr. Kincaid's upraised finger, — "goodness knows I 've been bother enough to you without you takin' the time — vallyble time — to go all the way to the train with me. 'T ain' necessary; you don' think I 'd spend that money on anything but the tickets" —

"Why, Jared!" broke in Mr. Kincaid, deeply

pained to have in any way, however unintentionally, hurt his protégé's feelings. "Why, my friend, whatever in the world put that absurd notion into your head? Don't you know that I trust you? Well, I do. I trust you, Jared, I trust you *thoroughly!* There! Now sit down and we 'll chat a little longer before you go. You know we shan't have the opportunity again in a hurry. Eh? Sit down."

But pretty soon Jared made another attempt to leave. "I guess I 'd best be toddlin'," he said, rising from his chair. "I 've a few things to see to; an' I don' like to be keepin' you from your work, sir." He held out his big hand.

"Oh, but your letter of introduction to the Reverend Mr. Maynard!" cried uncle Gabriel. "We almost forgot that! I wrote one — but *where* 've I put it?" Hastily he turned over the contents of the chiffonier drawer, and tumbled the papers about on his table. "Oh, perhaps it 's in the dining-room; I remember now that I wrote it out there. Just sit down again and make yourself comfortable, Jared; I 'll be back in a minute."

But Jared did not sit down during his patron's absence. He continued to stand, and his eyes were fixed, with a horrible fascination, upon the open chiffonier drawer, where on a heap of disarranged collars, cuffs, and handkerchiefs lay uncle Gabriel's old pocket-book, in full view. The man's hand went out, the fingers working, clutching at the empty air, then fell by his side, and turning his back he stared unseeingly down upon the table.

Suddenly Jared wheeled around, made a stride to the drawer, snatched out from the pocket-book the bill Mr. Kincaid had left there, and stooping, shoved it inside his shoe — the new shoes that uncle Gabriel had given him. "He had n't ought to left me alone, alone — me — a jail-bird!" he muttered fiercely. His breath grew short, a wild excitement came into his manner. "It 's mos' too easy!" he declared, with a nervous contortion of the mouth that was intended for a smile. Seizing the overcoat that lay over the foot-rail, with a few rapid sweeps of his hand it was folded and deposited in the carpet-bag. Darting into the drawing-room he swooped down upon a valuable little bronze match-box which Miss Austin had given Margaret, and in a trice that also was stowed away in the same receptacle. The whole thing was done with marvelous dexterity and quickness, and when Mr. Kincaid reëntered the room, Jared received him with the stolid composure which was that gentleman's habitual experience of him.

"Here it is," uncle Gabriel remarked, handing the letter of introduction to his protégé. "Put it in a safe place, Jared, and deliver it just as soon as you arrive in Denver — before you even get a meal. Mr. Maynard is a good man, an excellent, good man! and a faithful friend of mine. He 'll be a friend to you, too, Jared. You must go? I suppose you 're right to get on board the train early and have a good night's rest. Well, friend," the little man's voice grew very gentle and affectionate, "we 've known each other for a consider-

able length of time; now our paths are diverging, and we may never meet again — let us pray before we part."

Jared's face darkened, he made an involuntary movement toward the door; but the hand upon his arm drew him back. The two men knelt down beside the narrow white bed, side by side, and with one hand resting upon Jared's clenched fist uncle Gabriel prayed — "O God, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright; grant to us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen."

Then they rose up, and Mr. Kincaid led his friend out into the public hall, and there they parted. "Good-by, Jared! God's blessing be with you!" was uncle Gabriel's benediction.

Jared looked up at the bright kindly face smiling down at him over the banisters, at the brown near-sighted eyes across which lay an undeniable moisture, and a curious sound escaped his lips. It was intended for "Good-by," but was really a cross between a grunt and a groan.

"Poor fellow! He feels the parting!" thought the little clergyman with gratification — the protégé was not given to emotion — and he went back to his room and began his work of correcting the dictionary proofs — arduous work, of a kind he particularly disliked, and which he had yet cheerfully undertaken for Jared's sake.

Ponderously, with lagging feet, went Jared down the stairs he had so often trod. Never again would he go up them, he told himself; at that very moment he turned suddenly and retraced a step or two, then hurriedly and impatiently resumed his downward way. At the door of the house he again paused, with his hand on the knob, swayed by two strong emotions; the expression of his face frightened a little child who ran past him. "He trusted me!" "He had n' ought to 've lef' me there — he knew I was a jail-bird!" Good and evil fought within the man's breast — and presently, with an awful oath, he swung the door open, and striding out into the sweet April night was lost in the darkness.

Evil had triumphed.

Uncle Gabriel came home late the next evening. The dictionary had held his attention for the greater part of the day, so that he had found quite a company of poor Italians awaiting him at the river office when he finally reached there. He had listened to their tales of woe, no less volubly told for the delay; had counseled, comforted, and calmed what Francie saucily designated as his "constituents," settling disputes, encouraging the timid, and in general straightening out difficulties. He had gone to a restaurant and ordered a cheap dinner, and then given it, untouched, to a poor hungry creature who eyed him wolfishly from the door. Without a cent in his pocket, the little man had walked up town, and now had reached home,

tired, empty, and weighed down by an unusual and unaccountable depression that was hardest of all to bear.

Frances ran down a couple of the long flights of stairs to meet Mr. Kincaid. "Dear blessed old boy! Him looks *dreffle* tired!" she declared; standing a step or two above her uncle, she turned his face up between her hands, and kissed him. "Did n't have a thing to eat, not even from a lunch wagon, did him? I thought not! You 're bad — yes, you are — bad! — not to take better care of yourself when you know we all love you. Never mind," she snuggled her piquante little face against uncle Gabe's for a moment, in token of forgiveness; "come on upstairs with me. I had a feeling that you 'd come home all tired out, and I 've just cooked you a little supper — all by my own self. It 's waiting for you — a nice cup of beef tea — just as you like it — and a chop — brown and juicy, done to a turn. Does n't the mere hearing of it make your mouth water? And you 'll eat it right away, won't you?"

"Why, of course I 'll eat it right away — never you fear!" laughed uncle Gabriel. "I 'm as hungry as a hunter. Take care, or I 'll gobble you up, as a relish. Ha! ha!" They were going up the steps together, his arm around Francie's waist. "Any letters for me? Anything from Jared?" he asked. "He said he 'd post a line in time for me to receive it by the last delivery this evening."

"He 's back — here — waiting for you. And he looks dreadfully!" Frances whispered, relieved

to have accomplished her errand. "Mother sent me to tell you" —

Mr. Kincaid started violently. "What! Jared *back?* What 're you saying?" he cried in consternation. Dashing up the steps he reached the public hall, and came face to face with his protégé. "You here, Jared! What does this mean?" demanded uncle Gabriel, surprise and agitation giving an unusual peremptoriness to his tone.

Jared hastily put out an appealing hand; his other hand held the carpet-bag which he had carried the night before. "Parson, let 's go where I can talk to you," he begged hoarsely, and one glance at his drawn, sodden face, his desperate eyes and fierce mouth, completely routed Mr. Kincaid's short-lived anger.

"Certainly, certainly," he agreed. "Come to my room. Francie, run and open the other door for me. Eat?" His hunger forgotten, he looked blank at his niece's reminder. "Oh! — yes, by and by, by and by, my dear. I could n't now. Come, Jared."

When the two men were in Mr. Kincaid's little room and the portière drawn, Jared sat down heavily in the chair which his patron silently pushed toward him, and opening the carpet-bag, drew out of its depths the overcoat which he had packed into it the night before. With this in one hand and the bronze match-box in the other, he looked up at his friend. "I stole these las' night," he said, dully doggedly. "Stole 'em from you while you was out of the room, gettin'

the letter of interduction. What you goin' to do 'bout it?"

Uncle Gabriel threw a hasty glance at the closet within which he had supposed his coat hung; bewilderment, incredulity, deep pain, appeared in rapid succession on his expressive face.

"An' I stole the ten dollars out of the pocket-book in the drawer," went on Jared, in the same dull monotone. "What you goin' to do 'bout it?"

With shaking fingers Mr. Kincaid opened the drawer, opened the pocket-book, and hunted through every compartment. It was empty. He turned and faced the thief. "And I *trusted* you!" he said sadly, brokenly. Sitting down on the bed, he put one hand before his eyes; his lips were moving, but no sound came from them.

Leaning forward in his chair, Jared watched uncle Gabriel intently; and presently it entered into his dull mind to comprehend what his friend's quiet meant. "He 's prayin' for me!" he thought, with a heavy start, his sodden face turning a dark red. And then the strange Power which had held and tormented him throughout the last twenty-four hours, and finally brought him again to his long-suffering friend, now forced him to full confession.

"Yes, you trusted me!" he broke out, when he could no longer bear the silence. "You 're the only person what 's ever trusted me, the only one. An' *you* had n' ought to done it. You knew what I 'd been; you should n' 've trusted me one minute alone with anything that could be stole. I ain't

like you; I ain't one of the good kind, though I 've pretended it many a time to blind you. I 'm a bad egg — bad as ever they come — an' you might 's well know it all. I did n't mean to go to no Denver." He saw Mr. Kincaid's violent start, but went doggedly on with his story, pausing now and then between the sentences. "I meant to get all the money I could out of you, then scoot with it — go on a tremendous spree — an' never lay eyes on you again. . . . When you lef' me alone I took all I could. I 'd 've got more, if you had n' come back so quick. . . . I intended to pawn the things soon 's I went out, but, somehow, I did n't, I kep' puttin' it off. But I spent a good pile of the money, besides the ten I took out the purse; that went first, an' what you gi' me for meals on the cars," the peculiar contortion that did Jared service for a smile flashed across his ugly mouth and was gone. "I e't an' I drank my fill — for once! I went to the theyater — I made a night of it — a terrible night! An' maybe you think I had a tearin' good time!"

Jared rose from his chair; gripping the foot-rail of the bed with one brawny hand on which the big veins stood out, he waved the other at Mr. Kincaid; his heavy face worked convulsively, his voice grew thick and agitated. "Talk about your hell punishment," he cried, "there can't be no worse hell than I carried roun' with me last night an' to-day. I 've done worse things in my life than steal from a parson, but I 've never had no such torment here to contend with," touching his breast.

"I tried to get away from it — I ain't used to bein' chicken-hearted — but I could n' — I could n'! That 's why I come back. I did n' want to come, but I *had* to. I never thought that all you 'd done for me, every kind word you 'd spoke, every prayer you 'd prayed with me, every cent you 'd took from yourself to give to me would 've rose up an' tormented me like it done." The sorrowful gaze of his friend was more than Jared could bear; hastily he turned his own eyes away. "I could n' eat enough, I could n' drink enough, no matter how much I poured down, to forget you! I could n' pawn your overcoat, I could n' spen' the rest of the money. Here" — he threw the bronze match-box upon the bed and uncle Gabriel's overcoat after it. Then, slowly, reluctantly, — only God could know at what struggle, — he laid beside them all that was left of the roll of bills, his friend's gift of the night before. "That 's the best I can do," he said gruffly. "Now, I 'll be off. You won't want no such devil's spawn 's I am round you again." Picking up the carpet-bag, he pushed aside the portière to go out, but Mr. Kincaid's hand arrested him.

A kindness that was divine shone in the little gentleman's eyes, and sounded in his voice. "You are the child, not of the devil, but of God, Jared, sinful and erring; but *always* the child of God! Don't you ever forget that! He would never refuse forgiveness to one of his penitent children; and how should I dare deny to you the forgiveness that I ask of Him for myself every

day? I forgive you, Jared, for I believe you to be truly sorry for what you 've done."

"*Sorry?*" cried Jared vehemently; his heavy under lip shook. "Parson, I 've never been so sorry for anything I done in all my life! You might know — when I come back!" His gesture toward the articles on the bed spoke volumes.

"Suppose that matter could be arranged — just suppose it were possible — would you go to Denver and try to make a better name for yourself?" Mr. Kincaid asked slowly.

Jared made an impatient movement. "No sense bringin' that up, parson. I 've had my chance an' lost it," he answered roughly. "We won' say any more 'bout that."

"Yes, but we will," gently persisted uncle Gabriel. "I have no more money of my own — not a cent; but, perhaps, *perhaps*, I could borrow enough to — er — make up what is missing. So that you might still go out and fill the situation."

The protégé's jaw dropped, he made a step forward. "What! you 'd do this for me, *after* what I done?" he cried out incredulously.

Uncle Gabriel nodded; tears were in his eyes. "You 've been an under dog all your life; now I want you to have the chance to be something better," he said.

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Jared. Dropping into a chair, he laid his arms on Mr. Kincaid's table and buried his face in them; several heavy sobs shook his big frame.

"If I do this, can I trust you to make honest

use of the opportunity?" asked uncle Gabriel presently.

Jared lifted his face. All his stolid composure was gone; his eyes were wet, and the heavy lips and chin worked with emotion. "Ay, parson, you can!" he cried hoarsely, striking his hand on the table to lend emphasis to the words. "I 'll *force* myself to be trusted! I 'd be worse 'n a brute beast, if I did n' make you *some* returns for all you 've done for me! Gi' me this one chance more, an' le' me show you what I can do. I 'll pay you the money I stole, I will — I will! I 'll pay you back every cent, an' I 'll try — harder 'n I ever tried before — to be honest. Only," his hands went out imploringly, — "only don' let 'em put me where I 'll handle money; there 's a devil in here as well 's a heart!" motioning to his breast. "Keep money out of my way, an' I swear," he lifted one big brawny shaking hand, — "I swear to you, not by God, parson — I 've broke too many promises of that sort — but by the memory of the only creature in the world that I never ill-treated, never wronged — by the memory of my li'l' baby girl that died years ago." Two big tears ran down Jared's face. "She loved me, that li'l' thing, an' I never laid a rough finger on her. I 'd 'a' gi'n my life to save hers, but she had to go. Annie is the best I know, parson, an' I swear to you by her that I 'll try to live honest if I ever get to Denver. You can ask your God to help me, parson" —

"My God, and *your* God, too, Jared," came in the little gentleman's earnest, hopeful voice.

"Have courage, my friend; and have faith in His mercy. The Christ who, in the midst of His own agony, yet heard and pardoned the penitent thief, will never turn from you. And, if it be allowed in the other world, don't you think your little Annie is pleading for you? Come, friend, let us lift our hearts to Him." Kneeling down beside Jared, with an arm thrown across the man's bowed shoulders, uncle Gabriel poured out his soul in prayer. And the deep fervor, the simple speech, and childlike, absolute faith in the mercy and love of God, in the human sympathy of Christ, brought a light into the soul of the poor sinner in whose behalf the prayer was offered.

The noon train which left the city the next day for the West bore with it Jared Watkins, taking with him uncle Gabriel's blessing, an unfamiliar sense of respectability, and in his heart a new hope which, with God's help, would bear fruit in the future.

CHAPTER XII

"IN THE DAY'S JOURNEY"

"THEN it is understood that I am to have both Margaret and Ruth," Miss Austin said, as she rose to end her visit with Mrs. Jeffrey. "I 'm sorry to separate the twins," she added, smiling, "but it 'll be for only a week or ten days, and, as you say, Judith could not leave her duties just now. Our country place is most beautiful in May; and some very charming people will be in the house party, so I can promise the girls a fine time."

"You are exceedingly kind to give them this pleasure," remarked Mrs. Jeffrey; and "You know, Miss Austin, our things — Marnie's and my clothes — are very plain and simple," added Rufie, in her honest, downright fashion, and somewhat anxiously.

Miss Austin's smile broadened. "Don't be troubled about that, Ruth," she said. "Were you dressed in rags, one might look in your eyes and forget them all! Now, then," patting the shoulder of the blushing girl, "run and find Margaret for me, will you? Remind her that I 'm waiting to carry her off with me for the day."

"It 's settled — mother says we may go! And Miss Austin is waiting for you to go to Washing-

ton Square and spend the day. We 're to start for Lenox the end of this week," announced Ruth, with most unusual excitement in voice and manner, as she sailed into the room where were Margaret and Frances. "Miss Austin does n't mind our things being plain, and she says we 'll have a *lovely* time! Why, are n't you glad?" she asked, her eyes opening wide at the expression of her eldest sister's face.

Margaret was pinning on her hat, but now with an impatient jerk she caught the "sailor" from her head, and tossed it on the bed.

"No, I 'm *not* glad! I don't want to go one step. And I don't want to go to Washington Square to-day either," she declared, with considerable emphasis. Sitting down suddenly, she stared gloomily at the floor, supporting her face in her hand — a face that of late had lost much of its roundness. The peach bloom of her cheeks was paler, too; the brilliant eyes were more brilliant than of old because of the dark shadows which continually lay under them, and yet with an expression in their depths now and then that was wistful, troubled, almost pathetic, and quite unlike Margaret.

"I don't want to go! And I wish she would n't keep inviting me to Washington Square," repeated Marnie, twisting her shoulders pettishly.

Frances and Ruth opened their eyes at one another.

"Why, Mr. Austin 's there, and you 're going to marry him. I should think you 'd like to be where he was," remarked Rufie bluntly. "I thought

people that loved each other — engaged people — always wanted to be together. I 'm sure Jim used to look overjoyed " —

" *Don't!* " cried Margaret sharply, throwing out her hand — " talk such nonsense ! " she added, to cover her first exclamation. Springing up, she hastily pinned on her hat. " You 're talking the silliest! of what you know nothing at all about. I do wish you 'd all leave my affairs alone," she said irritably. " I declare, I 'd like to run away somewhere, where I would n't see a creature I knew — some far-away place where people could n't be forever tormenting me ! " Snatching up her gloves, Margaret walked stiffly to the door, but there turned and looked penitently at the two she had just scolded. " Girls, I *am* the crossest thing! Don't mind what I said," she begged; then went off to join Miss Austin.

" What 's the trouble? Do you suppose she does n't care for him any more? " solemnly asked Rufie, as Margaret disappeared.

" Oh, she must; did n't she give up Jim for him — dear old Jim who loved her so faithfully ! " Frances answered. " I think it 's so queer that she should prefer Mr. Austin," she continued thoughtfully. " Of course he 's very nice; and he does give Marnie the most beautiful presents ! but — well, to my mind he does n't seems *at all* the sort of person for her. He is so stiff — so formal with her — and she with him; positively she acts most of the time as if she were afraid she 'd do or say something that he would be

shocked at. People that love each other don't act that way."

"You and Ursula don't care for Mr. Austin, and Judy only likes him since he fell in with her playground scheme. Mother is most polite to him, but she loved Jim. I know uncle Gabe would n't break his heart if Mr. Austin never came here again. Nobody in the family cares for the poor man — but I do. I think he 's *very* nice!" declared Ruth sturdily. "He does n't seem half so old to me as he did at first; and he is certainly *very* kind! Think of his giving those houses for the playground, and of his interesting other people to give more houses, so as to have a large space. And of the money he 's collecting to begin the work with! Do we know any other person that would 've done all that? And another thing" — she turned her gray eyes searchingly upon Frances — "what do *you* know about people being in love? Or how they should act?"

"I don't know; but I can suppose — can't I?" retorted the "youngest," with a sudden accession of color.

"H'm!" remarked Rufie suspiciously. She had no secrets herself, and was inclined to be jealously averse to any reservation of confidence between sisters. Frances was well aware of this little weakness; and now, anxious to avert further questionings and to restore good humor, she leaned forward and became confidential. "I 'll tell you a secret — not a creature but mother knows it. I got a letter this morning from Mr. Custis, — you know,

the organist of our church, — and what do you think! He asks me to come over to the church this afternoon and *sing* for him! He wants to hear my voice. And if it suits him, he may give me a position in the choir! Would n't I be the luckiest girl if I secured that! I do get so tired of being a sponge upon my sisters — Ugh! please don't gobble me quite up, Miss Ogre!" pretending to shiver with fright before Ruth's indignant expression. "I 've been fairly pining to ask Mr. Custis to try my voice; but I could n't get up the assurance to approach him. And now if he has n't done the asking himself! This is my opportunity — if only I don't get frightened almost out of my wits, and quite out of my voice!"

"Mr. Custis is n't acquainted with us — how do you suppose he came to send for you?" asked Rufie, with interest.

Frances nodded wisely. "I — mother and I think that, perhaps, it may 've come through Jack Rose — Mr. Rose. The Roses go to our church, and Ja — Mr. Rose used to be in the choir; he knows Mr. Custis. See?"

"He is another very kind man, that Mr. Rose," decided Ruth. "He got you that arranging of Mrs. Erveng's rooms; he helped uncle Gabriel to send that man Jared off to Denver; he took Ursa's novel to his own publishers; and I should n't wonder at all if he *were* at the bottom of this, as you say. I like him, too, though he is so quiet."

"Quiet!" exclaimed Frances in surprise. "Why, he 's never seemed so very quiet to me. He talks

quite enough!" she added, with a slight lifting of the head, "as if," so Ruth told Judy later, — "as if I 'd said something against him!" "And think how clever he is, Ruth, and so modest with it! Ursula says he is of a great deal of importance in the office, and we know what his books are. *I* think it is an honor to have such a man for a friend!" Francie's cheeks were warm; and to carry off her embarrassment and blushes she hastily caught up a piece of Ruth's sewing that was lying on the bed. "Come on out in the dining-room, and I 'll help you with this gown," she offered. "I 've a little time to spare before I begin practicing. I 'm not due at the church until a quarter past five. If you and Margaret are to go to Lenox at the end of this week, we 'll all have to help get you ready."

"Oh, we 're not going to make any desperate effort," Rufie said, with calm decision. "Miss Austin understands that we can't afford to dress as fashionable people do. Is n't it perfectly sweet of her to include me in the invitation as well as Marnie?"

Prompt to the minute of the time Mr. Custis had appointed, Frances arrived at the old brown church across the square. By her own choice she went alone. "I 'd so much rather not have any of the family along, mother," she had urged. "I am dreadfully nervous now, and I know 't would make me still more nervous to have one of you dear people sitting there listening to me and just on the

quiver lest I should fail. Of course it 's silly to feel so — but just let me have my way to-day, won't you? Mr. Custis said his wife would be at the church; and she 'll be enough." And with a very brave and independent front, but thumping heart, the young lady had started out on her venture.

On reaching the church Frances found that hers was not the only voice Mr. Custis was to try that afternoon. And as she sat in the organist's cosy office listening to the clear, strong notes that floated in from the choir-stalls, a cloud of intense self-depreciation settled down upon her. She hardly heard Mrs. Custis's friendly remarks; and when, after a while, the organist came in and said pleasantly, "Now, Miss Jeffrey, it is your turn; will you step into the church?" Frances felt as if her feet could scarcely take her there.

"Do you really think there 's any use in my attempting to sing this afternoon?" she asked despairingly. "At my very loudest I could n't sing as that lady did who has just gone out. And I hate to take your time for nothing." All the saucy brightness was gone out of her face, it was white, her eyes were beseeching, her lips dry and trembling — indeed, she was trembling from head to foot.

"It may be just as well for you that your voice is n't like that lady's," Mr. Custis said dryly, turning over the music Francie had brought with her. "Don't feel that this is your only opportunity of singing for me," he added kindly, to

reassure her. "If you fail to-day, you can come again, and again. Just take a seat in that stall while I play over this voluntary." He did this to give her time to collect herself. "I 'll be at your service in a few moments."

The "voluntary" was the adagio from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony; and as Frances sat listening to the noble strains, her courage returned. She thought of those at home, to whom her success meant so much. "I owe it to them to do well," she thought, reasoning herself into confidence, gazing absently down into the body of the church, where the afternoon shadows were fast gathering and shrouding the pews in soft mysterious darkness. "They 've all been so generous, so *dear* to me! And I 've always wanted to sing in church." Her fingers went over her eyes for a few minutes; her head bowed. And when, as the last note of the adagio died away, Mr. Custis asked, "Do you know Dyke's arrangement of 'Lead, Kindly Light'? Could you sing it?" Francie immediately rose and held out her hand for the music.

"I 'll try to sing it," she said, with a brave attempt at her own bright smile.

The hymn was a favorite at home, she knew the music by heart, and with the sheets drooping limply over the hands clasped before her, she stood and sang to the empty pews.

Francie's voice was of exceptional *timbre*, and sweet to the highest note, full, flexible, and true, possessing the dramatic quality, and, as well, that rarer quality of magnetic, personal sympathy with-

out which no voice, however wide its range, is perfect.

In the opening lines a tremor betrayed that nervousness still lingered with the singer, but the dear familiar words brought confidence, and soon all but the sheer delight of expression was forgotten. Up and up soared the clear young voice, filling every corner of the building with its pure melody, falling upon the greedy ears of a listener who had slipped into a pew near the door, and delighting the critical, difficult taste of the organist.

Mr. Custis followed every note with the interest and growing excitement of the "born" choirmaster over a musical "find," a *rara avis*, than which there is none more eager. While Frances with all the fervor and worship of her heart was singing, —

> . . . "remember not past years.
> So long Thy power has blest me, sure it still
> Will lead me on
> O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
> The night is gone,
> And with the morn those angel faces smile,
> Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile."

Mr. Custis's brain was busy with her future — training, advising her, selecting solos which would call out the beauty of her voice, and, in fancy, hearing her sing them, in that very stall in which she now stood.

He was delighted with Francie's rendering of the hymn, but when it was finished and she turned to him with wistful, questioning eyes which it was hard to resist, his only answer was, "Now, sing

this," in a tone so business-like and non-committal that the poor child's heart sank. "This" proved to be Mascheroni's "For all Eternity;" several other pieces followed, and a trial of reading at sight. Frances had been well taught, and she did her best, though always handicapped by the conviction that she was doing her worst. Mr. Custis's remarks, therefore, when the test was over and they were once more in the choir-room, were an overwhelming surprise. The choir-master was a tall man, with the fine-cut features, proud yet gentle air, and noble bearing that one is apt to attribute to the knights of old — a Percevale or Galahad. And the soul within was exceptionally upright and pure, ever filled with the chivalry and kindly courtesy of one who was a follower of a greater, nobler King than Arthur.

"Miss Jeffrey, you have a beautiful voice! I am delighted with it!" he said, smiling down into the anxious face with which Frances awaited his opinion. "You are very young yet; put in some years of steady, unremitting study and hard work, and with good health, I have no doubt whatever that your voice will one day bring you fame and a fortune. In the mean time, I should like to have you in my choir. As our appropriation for music is not large, I cannot offer you more than four hundred dollars a year. This, I know, is less than your voice deserves; but perhaps the training and experience which you would gain here may count for something. You may be sure that I shall give you the benefit of every advantage in my power,"

he added warmly, "though"—again smiling—"I don't expect to be able to keep you here by and by, when better offers begin to come to you — as they certainly will."

But Frances scarcely heard his last remarks. "Oh!" she exclaimed, with a gasp of delighted astonishment. "Four hundred dollars! Why, Mr. Custis, I think that is a *great* deal! Oh, this is splendid!" The blood came glowing into her cheeks, her eyes sparkled, and all her even white teeth flashed into view as she threw back her head in a laugh, so happy and contagious that, with a merry glance at each other, the organist and his wife followed suit.

"I never expected this; I thought I was singing so badly!" Frances said joyously; then, coming back to a sense of Mr. Custis's offer: "I should be very, *very* glad to sing here, and I think I will. But, of course," with a bright, appealing glance at her new friend, "I could n't decide upon that before talking it over with mother and my uncle. I *know* they 'll be delighted!" Again her mouth was all a-smile. "And I will write to you very soon about it, Mr. Custis. You 've been *so* kind and patient with me!" she finished gratefully. Then Mr. Custis and his wife returned to the office, and Francie made her way through the church to the door, in her delight hardly knowing if she were carried along by feet or wings.

In the vestibule she turned back and knelt for a few minutes in a dark corner of one of the pews. And while the girl's head was bowed upon her

hands, a shadowy occupant of another pew not far away arose and slipped noiselessly out of the church. In the light of the May afternoon the shadow resolved itself into a very substantial man, wearing gray clothes and a gray soft hat. The hat shaded a shrewd hard face, and was doffed with some grace when its wearer advanced and met Frances at the foot of the church steps.

"Excuse the liberty I take in addressing you," he hastened to say suavely, as the girl drew aside from him with a startled face. "I 've just had the pleasure of hearing you sing," — he motioned to the church, — "and I 'd very much like to have a little conversation with you about your voice. I will not detain you long."

Her one swift glance at the man's face had not pleased Frances. "You are a stranger to me; and I prefer not to talk with you about my voice," she said, with a bluntness that would have done credit to Rufie; and straightening her slim young figure, she marched rapidly past him, into the little park that lies before the church. But ere she reached the tulip-bordered fountain, her new acquaintance was beside her.

"I beg that you will listen to me — for your own interest," he urged. Then, finding that Frances would neither take nor look at the card he held out, he proceeded to introduce himself and state his object as briefly as possible. "Harwood is my name — Townley B. Harwood. I 'm well known in this city, and am especially interested in musical matters. I 'm bringing out a new light opera very

soon, and your voice would suit the leading part to a T. I could get any number of fine sopranos, — they 're not scarce, — but your voice is just about what I want; and I 'd like to make you an offer. I 'm a perfectly respectable man, I assure you, miss; I could bring you piles of references — from the very best people in New York. And I 'm in a position to make you a very liberal offer. That 's my style, miss; I believe in 'live and let live.' I 'll make you a liberal offer, and I 'll bring you before the public in a way to insure your fortune. That 's what I 'll do!"

Francie slackened her pace, and threw a half glance at Mr. Harwood. "I 'm much obliged for your offer," she said politely; "but I can't accept it. I am going to sing in a church."

"In a church!" cried the musical director, with an air of such utter incredulity as quite impressed his audience. "With *your* voice, content yourself with singing in a church! Why, miss, that would be doing an injustice to yourself and the world. On the stage is where you belong — the operatic stage. Why, with that voice you 'd have the easiest kind of a walkover to world-wide fame, not to mention a tremendous fortune. If you are n't ambitious for yourself, just think of your relatives," urged this Machiavelian musician. "Maybe you 've got a mother; now, would n't she take big pride in your success? for successful you 're bound to be. Maybe you 've got other family; think of all you would do for them with the gold that 'd pour into your lap! And give up

all that to sing in a church, like anybody with a tuppenny whistle of a voice, and for a paltry two or three hundred a year! Churches never pay liberally. Why, 't would be wicked — sheer, reckless wickedness — that 's what 't would be!" He grew quite heated, nevertheless keeping a wary eye on the prize he was so anxious to secure.

"Oh, I am to get more than that! I 'm to get *four* hundred!" cried Frances proudly; eager to defend Mr. Custis and her beloved church from the imputation of stinginess.

"Ah, really! how generous!" remarked Mr. Harwood scornfully. "D' you know what *I* am offering you? — thirty-five dollars a week to sing three evenings in the week! D' you know how much that is a year? Over *eighteen hundred dollars!* Compare that with four hundred."

He caught a glimpse of Francie's astonished face, and quickly followed up his advantage. "And just as soon as we see what you can do — I know you 'll do well — I 'll give you more pay; forty, maybe fifty dollars a week. I tell you I 'm a *liberal* man, you could n't get into better hands. Fifty dollars a week 'd be two thousand, six hundred a year — a little fortune in itself! You 'd soon get rich. And from the light opera on you 'll go to grand opera — become another great American prima donna, like Eames and Nordica — in Parsifal, Faust, Lohengrin." He paused, with a sly, self-congratulatory chuckle.

He had struck a note that stirred Francie's blood until it bounded through her veins, that gave dis-

tinct form to what had been vague, almost unconscious longings on her part, and roused into full clamorous life all the strong dramatic instincts of her nature.

"What would you require me to do?" she demanded breathlessly, wheeling round upon Mr. Harwood.

The musical director was an old stager. Full well he knew the irresistible combination which that brilliant vivid little face and warm eager personality would prove with Francie's fine voice; and with this first distinct sight of his incipient prima donna, he congratulated himself anew on his luck in having "discovered" her.

"You would n't have to do much," he hastily replied to Francie's inquiry; "just to sing three evenings in the week — Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays; we alternate with another opera. Three times a week — that 's all. And I 'm sure singing comes as easy as dancing, to you." Then he gave a few particulars, but with such reservations, such adroit prevarication, and instant acquiescence to all objections raised, that in the end Frances was left with a confused impression that was very far from the truth.

"I know you 'll never regret it, my dear young lady," the opera-bouffe manager said unctuously. "One of these days, before very long, you 'll be telling me, 'Mr. Harwood, you 're my best friend!' See if you don't! Now, miss, if you 'll kindly give me your name and address," he drew out his notebook. "There 'll have to be a little

agreement between us — just a form — a mere form," with an airy wave of his hand, "and I 'd like to know where to send it to you."

"I did want to do some good with my voice," Frances said wistfully, wavering between two desires as she glanced across at the old brown church.

"Good!" repeated Mr. Harwood, apparently in the greatest surprise. "Why, my dear miss! *where* could you do more good than in the position I offer you? In a church, of necessity your audience is limited; on the stage, there 'd be *no* limit to the crowds you could reach." He warmed to the subject, an old theme with him, and waxed eloquent. "Think of the great number of harassed, brain-tired, sad, and dispirited people to whom your beautiful sympathetic voice would give recreation, enjoyment, freedom from care! Is n't that doing good? And is n't it doing the highest kind of good to benefit the greatest number? Indeed, your sphere of usefulness will be but widened, your high and noble influence but farther reaching. There surely can be no question in your mind in regard to that!"

So positive and lofty was her new acquaintance's tone that Frances's last scruple slipped away; and she readily gave her name and address.

"But please don't send me any agreement until I write and ask you to do so," she added. "I must talk the matter over at home — with my family — before I decide."

"But you 're eighteen — you mentioned that.

You have the right to decide for yourself. Come, now, just say you 'll close with the bargain. Then I won't bother to find any one else for the position; I 'll keep it for you. Just say *positively now*, and I 'll wait willingly for the agreement until I hear from you." He was a keen reader of human nature, and understood, as well as if he had known her from her birth, that the spoken word of the girl before him would be as sacred to her as her bond.

But his urgency revived Francie's first instinctive dislike.

"If I were fifty years old, I would not enter into anything so important as this without first talking it over with my mother," she declared warmly. "Good-afternoon!"

The musical director saw his mistake. "You are right, miss, you are perfectly right!" he eagerly remarked. "Your deference to your parent does you great credit, great credit!" His tone gave Frances a feeling of irritation; figuratively speaking, as if she were being patted on the back. "I will not trouble you any more just now, Miss Jeffrey; I 'll wait with patience until I hear from you — though the sooner the better. I will only send you to-morrow some credentials which will prove to you and your family that I 'm the person I represent myself to be. With a thousand thanks for your kindness in allowing me this interview, I bid you good-afternoon!" Lifting his hat with great *empressement*, Mr. Harwood took himself off; and going straight to the grocery store

nearest to where the Jeffreys lived, soon made himself acquainted with all the information concerning the family that could there be obtained.

Relieved of his company, Frances walked slowly toward home; her brain teeming with glowing hopes and dazzling visions of the future. Wrapt in her own thoughts, she went unseeing on, and started back with surprise and some alarm when a man's figure stood stock-still before her, barring her way through the narrow park gate. But all fear vanished when she looked up and met Jack Rose's steady honest gray eyes, now alight with pleasure at seeing her.

"I 'm so glad to meet you! I've been wanting all day to see you!" he said eagerly; and for a moment they stood silent, hand in hand. Then, "Can you sit here with me just for a little while, before you go home?" he asked, pointing to a beneh in a quiet corner of the park, and under one of the widespreading noble elms.

Frances nodded, and they went over and took their places.

The day had been unusually warm, and the sun was sinking red in the west; his departing beams burnished the tops of the tall trees, turning the quivering, dancing leaves into living gold, while lower down, soft shadows gathered length and deepness. The gay red and yellow tulips took on a tenderer hue save where the sunlight, which streamed in at the wide-open west gate, fell aslant the flowers, making them vivid with color; and the play of the fountain came upon the ear with soothing, rhythmic

regularity. The peace of the hour was upon the almost deserted park.

The two young people felt its influence. Taking off his hat, Jack brushed the damp hair away from his forehead, and glancing at his companion, gave a sigh of content. "Is n't it good to be here?" he asked. "What were you thinking of so deeply when I met you at the gate?" The tone of voice more than his words signified how the friendship between the two had grown and strengthened since the day of that first visit of Frances to Betty Erveng.

"I 've had an experience this afternoon," Francie answered brightly. "'Lend thine ear,' and I 'll tell you all about it." And forthwith she related the interview with Mr. Custis, and the result of her singing in the church. But she said nothing of the musical director. "I 'll tell him one thing at a time," flitted across her mind even as she talked.

"Now, sir, what do you think of that?" she finished saucily. "And this is but the beginning of great things! What would you say to seeing me a prima donna one of these days — rich — famous — a great celebrity!" She had a trick of using her hands as she talked; and now an airy little flirt of the fingers lent charming emphasis to her words.

Jack sat with his elbow on the back of the settee, his head resting on the hand that held his hat, looking at Frances. He loved to watch the brown eyes under the simple straw hat grow brilliant

with merriment or soft with emotion as the story progressed; and the girl's frank winning smile brought an answering smile to his lips. Jack's face was grave, but in his eyes just then was an expression which Frances could not meet for long, and yet which she would not for the world have had absent from them.

"What is being famous?" Jack asked; then, dreamily, with a slow tender smile, he quoted, "'You are none the better because you are praised; you are none the worse because you are blamed; what thou art, thou art.' 'T is the quality of the soul within that makes one great. Could your soul be any greater, nobler, as a famous prima donna, than now as pure-hearted little Francie Jeffrey? I 'm so glad you 're to sing in church! To me sacred music takes a large place in the worship of God. And there your beautiful voice will do the most good in the best way."

Down to the ground with a run went Francie's fine castles in the air; like whipped curs her glowing fancies skulked rapidly away. A strong repugnance for Mr. Harwood struggled side by side with an equally strong disgust for what she now considered as her "consuming vanity and conceit"!

Oh, why had she given that horrid man her name and address? Why had she ever listened to him? She opened her mouth to tell Jack the whole story — then changed her mind at the expression she surprised on his face. Her own difficulties were forgotten; leaning forward impulsively, with a shy, kindly little forefinger she

touched the hand of her friend as it lay upon his knee.

"Jack," she said softly, "something 's wrong. Could you tell me what it is? Mother says 'a trouble shared is often a trouble lightened.'"

"Yes," he answered simply, "I 'll tell you. I think you ought to know, that 's why I asked you to sit here with me. My brother Paul is in trouble. You know what a brilliant, clever fellow Paul is; we expected great things of him. But he got in with a bad set, and he 's been going it at a tremendous pace. To-day he came to tell me" — the hand on Jack's knee clinched, a dull red spread slowly over his face, to the roots of his hair — "to tell me he has been expelled from college! He has some debts — a good many — that have to be paid; and he wants to get out of New York right away, if possible. We all expected him to be a lawyer, like Felix; but Paul thinks he 'd be happier as a musician — an organist. He has always been fond of music; and now he wants to go off to some city where, as he says, no one 'll know anything about this trouble, and where he can make music his profession. I don't think much of the scheme myself, but he is in dead earnest over it — and awfully cut up just now. I think he should have his chance."

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Frances, as her friend paused.

Jack nodded gravely. "My father went through Columbia with a splendid record," he continued, in the same quiet tone; "so did Felix. Phil and I

did n't have their brains," — in his modest estimate of himself Jack did not understand the protest that his companion's quick gesture conveyed, — "but we did our best, and scrambled through. In some ways my father is very particular — he *expects* certain things from his children. Going through college in the best way you can is one of those things. I'm afraid 't would almost break his heart to know this about Paul. I could n't tell him of it — I could n't go to him for help for Paul. And Paul has quarreled with Felix and Max; he says he would n't take a dollar from them if he were starving! He *is* willing to let me help him, and, under the circumstances, I think I am the proper person to do it. But" — Jack lifted his honest eyes, sombre with the ache in his heart — "I could n't do so without first speaking to you. I felt I owed it to you." He paused; then, to control his voice, began speaking very slowly. "Francie, I have n't told you in so many words, but I think you know how dearly I love you. Ever since I first saw you, my great hope has been that I might some day win you for — my wife!" The way in which Jack said those last two words thrilled Frances to the heart.

"Betty knows what I feel for you — and your mother knows — I spoke to her one evening about it," went on the quiet, honest voice. "And I 've been working and saving to have enough for a home before I asked you to marry me. Now," — Jack swallowed hard; the next sentences were more and more difficult to utter, — "now, to get

Paul out of his scrape, and put him on his legs again, — he can't go empty-handed to a strange city, — will take all that I 've saved. I intend to do this for Paul — I 'm thankful to be able to help my brother in his time of trouble. But it puts an end to my hopes — it would n't be fair to you " — Then looking steadily at Frances with hopeless eyes, " I would n't have burdened you with this sad story of poor Paul, but I felt you had a right to know — to understand — why certain words which I had hoped to say to you were not spoken by me. I " — Jack's voice suddenly gave out, his hand went across his eyes.

The expression of patient resignation on his pale face affected Frances curiously; she felt a strong desire both to laugh and to cry.

When presently Jack looked up, wondering at her silence, he found her " teary roun' the lashes," but making a desperate effort after her own bright, saucy smile.

" Yes," she said gently, " you must give Paul his chance." Then, to save herself from a flood of tears, the sunny smile flashed out, while burning blushes made vivid the little piquante face. " We 're neither of us so very old," she remarked demurely; " I suppose we *could* possibly wait — until you 'd saved some more money! "

" You mean " — cried out Jack breathlessly, bending eagerly forward, his eyes, wide open, imploring, searching, fixed upon Frances.

" You are a good man, a loyal brother; and oh, Jack! you *are* the dearest old blind goose! "

whispered that young person roguishly, putting out to him the small, kindly, shy forefinger that had done him service before. Then her under lip began to quiver, a tear made its way down one burning cheek, and the little finger was drawn back — but too late!

With an exclamation of joy Jack had caught, not only the finger, but the hand to which it belonged, into the strong, safe keeping of his own two eager hands.

A little later that afternoon Frances rang the bell of her home and walked into the dining-room where the family sat at tea.

"My dear, where have you been? We did n't know what had become of you!" cried Mrs. Jeffrey; and "Well; you 've given us a fright!" "What 's the result of the singing?" "My! but you look as if something had happened!" remarked several other members of the family.

As she passed her mother, Frances hastily whispered, "I 'll tell you everything as soon as I can, mother;" then aloud, "It 's good news and a long story," she said, smiling. "I 'll tell it all by and by — when we 're in the drawing-room. Only some dessert, Ursa; I 'm not a bit hungry."

"Dear me! do hurry, everybody, and get finished," urged Rufie. "I 'm dying to hear!"

But as it fell out, the story was not told at all that evening, save to Mrs. Jeffrey, and, in the confidence of the midnight hour, to Ursula. Rufie had gathered the family into the parlor, and uncle

Gabriel was saying, in the cheeriest of tones, "Come, Francie, take the floor," when the bell rang sharply.

Every one listened, with the interested attention which a ring at the bell always secures in an apartment.

Footsteps came rapidly through the rooms, and Margaret appeared between the drawing-room portières — a Margaret with indignant flashing eyes, and a face out of which all the bloom had faded. She made a step forward, and Mrs. Jeffrey rose quickly to meet her.

"Mother!" cried Marnie loudly, defiantly, "I 've broken my engagement with Mr. Austin. I *could n't* stand it any longer! And I 've had a fuss with Miss Austin! I know you 're all disgusted with me — I can't help it if you are — I don't care!"

She ran forward, and, throwing herself into her mother's arms, broke into a wild passion of tears.

CHAPTER XIII

FRIEND URSULA

So excited and overcome was Margaret that not until the next morning could Mrs. Jeffrey get a clear understanding of what had happened. And then it was such a pale, tired, most unhappy girl who made confession that the mother's heart yearned over her.

"I thought I loved him, mother, truly I did, or I never would 've taken him," Marnie said. "You told me once that 't was Mr. Austin's money and position made me like him, and — perhaps you were right, mother — I don't know. But I thought I loved him — and for quite a while I *was* happy. Not like" — In a sudden rush the blood flooded Margaret's face; she made a quick, impatient gesture, as if by so doing she could thrust an unwelcome thought aside. "I was happy," she repeated firmly. "Had Roger asked me then to marry him at once, I would have done it gladly. I kept thinking of what I could do when I was married — how I 'd wear such beautiful clothes, and have lots of sport, and look after the girls, marry them off well, and all that. But, mother," Marnie's lips were quivering, heavy tears clouded her hazel eyes, "you know, those things can't make

up — for the loss of other things. I soon began to feel that. Oh, I 'm so thankful I found out in time that I did n't really care for him — before I married him! I 'm afraid I might 've got to actually dislike him! Would n't that have been awful! Oh, thank God, I had the courage to break it off!" Covering her face with her hands, Margaret sobbed aloud.

Mrs. Jeffrey spoke no word, but the touch of the tender mother hands on her shoulder gave the girl some comfort.

"Roger Austin is a good man, mother," Margaret continued presently; "good, kind, honorable, refined, but he is n't the man to make me happy. I know what you 're thinking of," she cried out, at the expression of her mother's face. "You 're thinking of — of what I said about — somebody else — about Jim. Oh, what a cruel, wicked, *silly* girl I 've been! But Mr. Austin is very different from Jim! he does n't feel things as — as Jim would. He has been so kind to me, you know the presents he has kept bringing me, and always so polite and attentive. But, mother," Margaret's voice dropped as if she were talking treason, "oh, he is *so* dull! I had to keep pumping my brain for things to talk about when we were alone together! There 's not a spark of fun in him. And conventional! Why, for — for days," — the color flamed in the pale cheeks, — "for days together he 'd never kiss me! I know he loved me — but he so seldom showed it. I never did care for a great deal of demonstration," Mar-

nie felt bound to add, "but, dear me, some people go to the other extreme, and that 's just about as bad. There were times when I felt as if I might have been as remote from Roger's affection as a piece of furniture, or some stranger. Truly! I should die or become as dull as a mummy or some other horrid nonentity if I had to be with him all my life! I 'm sorry to give him this pain, but I could n't, *could n't* marry him."

"You never loved him, that 's the trouble. You should never have engaged yourself to Mr. Austin," Mrs. Jeffrey said gravely. "He is another to whom you 've done a great injustice." She sighed.

"Miss Austin said that yesterday," confessed Margaret shamefacedly. "She said I 'd taken her brother for his money and position; she did n't put it quite so brutally as that, but that was what she meant. I got very angry. She was urging me about the wedding, mother; when the very thought of it made me heartsick. Then I got desperate and said some sharp, angry things — I 'd rather *die* than marry Roger Austin!" Marnie brought her closed hand down upon the arm of the chair with a fierce little pound. "I think I told her so; mother, I was so unhappy I hardly knew what I was saying! Miss Austin said sharp things, too! I went straight down to the library where he — Roger — was, and ended the whole affair then and there. I took off the ring, mother," Marnie leaned eagerly forward: "you know what a beauty that ring was — how

big and white the diamonds were — how they sparkled! I almost went wild with delight when I got it. Well, believe me, when I took it off and laid it on the table before Roger I felt as if I had dropped a shackle — I felt so free! I am not sorry I ended the engagement, mother — I 'm glad! If I never marry — if I stay poor all my life — if I have to work hard as long as I live — still I 'm free — free," with a wide sweep Margaret lifted her arms above her head; "free to be my own natural self again."

"You think only of yourself, Margaret," exclaimed Mrs. Jeffrey sorrowfully. "My child, have you no thought for the kindly gentleman whose heart you have thrown aside? First our dear old Jim, and now" —

Margaret threw out her hands imploringly. "I *am* sorry! Oh, mother, I am ashamed!" she cried. "I told Roger so. I begged him to forgive me. He won't feel this as — as — Jim does — did. Mr. Austin is n't like Jim in the very least. And I tried — oh, how I tried! — with all my strength to love him, but I could not! Mother, mother!" Margaret broke into a fit of crying, "I know you and the girls despise me! I saw it in Ursa's eyes last night. Oh, where did you ever get such a bad, selfish child as I am? Your eldest daughter, too; I ought to have been a comfort to you. But I 've learned a lesson — a hard one — and I 'm going to be different. First of all I must get some work — something to do. I *could n't*" — growing excited — "just sit about the

house, and think, think, all the time. Old Mrs. Linton, mother — you remember her? — said she 'd be glad to have me read to her and write letters for her three or four mornings in the week, whenever I could spare the time, and she 'd pay me for it. That was a good while ago, but I think I 'll go and see her in a few days, and if she 's of the same mind I'll begin right away. Mother," Marnie came swiftly to her mother's knee and knelt there, "if I had only followed your advice — about Mr. Austin! If I had only been content with — Oh, I 've been very, *very* unhappy! I 've felt so mean for a long time! Now, I 'm going to try to forget all about those Austins — that they even exist — and to behave as your daughter should. Help me, mother! Put your dear arms around me and say you forgive me."

"My dear child! My dear first-born Marnie! Of course I forgive and will help you!" cried the mother, drawing the weeping girl into her arms, pressing the hot tear-wet face against her shoulder.

But it was not quite so easy to forget the Austins, for they proved themselves far less conventional than might have been expected. On that same morning, not long after the talk between the mother and daughter, Miss Austin, who was a law unto herself, came to the house. Margaret declared she would not, could not, see the little lady, but finally ended by following her mother into the drawing-room.

With a heightened color and sorrowful eyes,

Mrs. Jeffrey went forward to meet her caller, while Margaret, shamed and a little defiant, lagged behind.

Miss Austin's greeting was a surprise to them both, and a relief. "We need not quarrel and never see one another again because Margaret does n't wish to marry my brother, need we?" she asked brusquely, yet kindly, and holding out her hand to Margaret's mother. "In the heat of our talk yesterday, we both said some disagreeable things," went on the visitor, looking at Margaret. "I now apologize for my share. The girl who puts from her the honor of being Roger Austin's wife loses too much," Miss Austin's white head went up, "for me to accentuate that loss by bitter words. I should rather be, and am, most thankful that the young lady discovered the state of her feelings in time!"

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Margaret involuntarily, fervently, then coloring crimson she sat silent, with downcast eyes.

"The great mistake was in engaging herself to Mr. Austin," remarked Mrs. Jeffrey gently. "I have the highest opinion of your brother," she added, "and am grieved that any child of mine should have brought this sorrow upon him."

Again Miss Austin's head went up, a little sparkle came into her bright black eyes. "He will get over it," she declared positively, with cold dignity, her sisterly pride up in arms. "There are plenty of women — the best of women — who would gladly console him. He will get

over it. Margaret never loved Roger — never," — growing warmer, — "or she would long ago have discovered his sterling worth, instead of tiring of him as she has. I saw it coming — I saw it — but I would not let myself believe it of *her!* Well," still with her head very erect, Miss Austin rose, "I felt I had given way to temper yesterday, and in my disappointment, said more than I intended, or, perhaps, had any right to say. Valuing your friendship as I do, Mrs. Jeffrey, I determined to come over here this morning and apologize to Margaret."

"Oh, Miss Austin! — it 's I should apologize to *you!*" cried out Margaret, with a burst of tears. "Indeed, if you could only know how dreadfully I feel about this, you would n't be angry with me. I love you — dearly! I felt worse about losing your friendship than" — The rest of the sentence was lost in a sob.

Miss Austin's sense of humor was stirred. "Poor Roger!" she thought grimly. Then the sight of Margaret's beautiful face convulsed with emotion, the red lips working like those of a child, the piteous imploring expression in the brown eyes, from which tears were pouring, revived the strong affection of old. "You don't deserve it," she declared, with kindly brusqueness, "but I *can't* stay angry with you!" And lifting herself upon the tips of her toes, she reached up and kissed the tall girl.

"Now, Mrs. Jeffery," Miss Austin said, later, when Margaret had gone weeping from the room,

— "now I 'm going to ask you to let me take Ruth to Lenox at the end of the week. Our programme is considerably changed," she went on, quietly ignoring Mrs. Jeffrey's start and look of great surprise. "My brother goes to Europe in a week or two, for an indefinite length of time. The house party we were to have had at our place is, of course, broken up. But I am going to Lenox for a little change, and I am begging Ruth of you for company. I think you *might* let me have her," finished the little lady sharply; "I shall be a lonely enough woman for many a long day while Roger is away!"

"Ruth shall certainly go, if she will," returned Mrs. Jeffrey warmly, whereupon Ruth was called in to decide the question for herself.

"Why — yes — I 'd like to go. You 're very kind to ask me," that young person said, after a moment of surprised silence; then there came a look of purpose into her gray eyes, and with the pretty pink deepening in her cheeks Ruth added bluntly, gazing steadily at Miss Austin, "We all think Marnie has n't acted very nicely, but I should n't like to have *you* say that. I should n't want to stay with you and hear you say things about my sister."

Had any other member of the family said that to Miss Austin, she would most undoubtedly have resented it. But she understood and liked Rufie; in fact, the girl's bluntness and simplicity amused her. "We are both sensible people, Ruth," she said, smiling. "You may be sure we shan't quarrel."

So it was settled that Ruth should go to Lenox with Miss Austin; and the little lady went away.

Nor was Miss Austin the only member of her family that came to the Jeffreys' house that day. About three o'clock in the afternoon, another visitor called. Mrs. Jeffrey and Frances were out together, uncle Gabriel and Ursula at their respective offices, Judy looking after her "poor people." But Margaret and Ruth were at home; and while Gretchen answered the bell, Rufie peeped cautiously from behind the dining-room portière, to get first information of the newcomer.

"Oh — it 's Mr. Austin! I heard his voice," she exclaimed, darting back to Margaret.

"Goodness me! what 'll I do? I don't want to see him," cried Margaret, rising up from the lounge in alarm, ready to flee away and hide. "I don't see why he should come here. I wrote him a few lines this morning, and gave it to mother, with all his presents to send back. I 'm not going to see him!"

"But you 'll have to, if" — began Ruth, when the stout little maid appeared, her round eyes rounder than ever. Well she knew that something unusual had occurred in the family; and her eyes dwelt curiously upon Margaret as she delivered her message. "Misser Austin in draw'n'-room — like for see Miss Yudit'."

The girls looked at each other in dismay.

"I do hope he is n't going to ask Judy to talk to me for him!" exclaimed Margaret, when Gretchen had retired.

"I hope he is n't going to take back the houses he gave for the playground!" cried Rufie, in consternation. "Judy's heart would be broken! You know, he said they were a gift from you and himself, and now, as you 've backed out — D' you suppose he would do such a mean thing?" Her eyes grew big with apprehension for her beloved twin. "Marnie, do go in and see him; find out if he 's come about that."

"I will *not* go in!" declared Margaret excitedly. "I wish the Austin family would emigrate to Kamschatka or some other far-away outlandish place, where I 'd never lay eyes on them again!" Catching up a piece of sewing, she began taking stitches at random; her eyes were so full of tears as to blind her.

Then Rufie arose, growing several inches taller in her indignation. "Margaret Jeffrey, you 're a selfish thing! you think of nobody but yourself!" she informed Marnie, with provoked candor. "First you threw poor Jim aside — for Mr. Austin — without caring a rap what became of the poor fellow. And now that you 've tired of Mr. Austin, you 've thrown *him* over; and you don't trouble yourself in the least about anything he may feel. It 's just your own feelings — yourself — yourself! Such a good kind man, too! Mother asked us not to speak to you about this affair, and I did n't mean to, but you *are* so selfish I simply could n't help speaking. There!" And with the last word off sailed Rufie into the parlor where sat Mr. Austin; while, with a burst of

tears, Margaret buried her face in the faded sofa cushion and wept bitterly.

"Judy is out, and mother — so I came in to see if I would do," Rufie said, with her own odd mingling of stately manner and simple phraseology. The little fracas in the dining-room had deepened the rose-blush in her cheeks; and when Mr. Austin rose and faced her, sympathy for him brought a very kindly expression into Ruth's eyes.

Never ruddy, at his best, to-day Roger's face wore a ghastly gray pallor that gave him an appearance of extreme delicacy; black circles under his eyes told of a sleepless night, and in the eyes themselves was such a quiet hopelessness as stirred Ruth into fresh indignation against Margaret.

"We 're all *so* sorry!" she exclaimed, holding out her hand to him with great cordiality.

"Thank you," Roger said quietly, as he spoke noticing for the first time the strong resemblance in Ruth to Margaret, despite the difference in their coloring. "Thank you for your sympathy; but," he winced a little, "Margaret's happiness is, of course, the first consideration. No, thank you, I'll not sit down," he continued calmly. "I called to see Judith in regard to the playground."

"Ah, yes!" cried Rufie breathlessly, her eyes widening with anxiety.

"I 'm putting my affairs in order, as I go to Europe in a few days or a week — as soon as I can; and I called to tell Judith what has been decided upon in regard to the playground. I have succeeded in interesting some men of wealth and

standing in the project. These men are convinced, as I am, of the great necessity for such a place in the very heart of the city, and they will take all necessary and proper legal steps to establish the children's playground as a permanence. As Judith knows, work has been begun; six houses in Deadlock Street are being rapidly pulled down, and it 's possible that we may get the whole end of the block, straight through to the other street; I hope so. I shall leave directions that during my absence she be kept fully informed of the progress of the work, which now it is thought may be completed by the early fall. No, Ruth," Mr. Austin put up his hand as Rufie began to speak, "thanks are due from, not to, me. I owe your twin sister many thanks for allowing me the opportunity of joining in the carrying out of her excellent plan. Now," he took up his hat, and held out a hand to Ruth, "good-by! Should we not meet again, I have some happiness," his voice wavered, "and many very pleasant occasions — for which to thank you all. I wish happiness to every member of the family!"

"Oh, but you will see me again," asserted Ruth quickly. "Miss Austin was here this morning, and she 's invited me to go to Lenox with her, on Saturday. You 'll be there, won't you?"

Roger looked very much surprised. "Indeed! yes?" he said, somewhat blankly. Then, for an instant a faint, conventional smile stirred his pale lips. "Then we shall meet again very soon," he said. "Good-by!" And with the sombre cloud

settling again upon his face, he bowed himself out.

"Any admittance for a straggler?" asked Paul Rose, putting his head inside the door of Ursula's office, or, more properly speaking, the small corner of the Leader building which had been partitioned off and dignified by that name. It was one of a number of similar dingy, uncomfortable little places — "coops," the men on the staff called them — in which the Leader work was done; and Ursula considered herself particularly well off in having the full width of a window in her "coop," through whose dusty panes the sunlight bravely struggled in. The desk was a table with a "game" leg; the chair a hard unsteady stool, which had been cut down to suit the height of the table. The wall and partition were pasted over with pictures cut from bygone Leaders — race-horses, public speakers, poets and statesmen, ballet dancers, ecclesiastical dignitaries, madonnas, champion players, and cartoons were there side by side, cheek by jowl, in the most friendly and harmonious fashion. This was the handiwork of a predecessor of Ursula, as was the sketch, done in red and black ink, which filled the unpainted middle panel of the "coop" door, and represented Mephisto with his attenuated barbed tail coiled gracefully around his bat-like feet, and using a slender wicked-looking pitchfork as a toothpick. In the head and half-picked bones of the figure lying at Mephisto's feet a very good likeness to Driscal, the angular, strong featured

editor of the Leader, had been accomplished. The motto below the sketch was, "Sic semper Tyrannis." Driscal was a touchy man; and it was a credited report in the office that the artist — jolly, satirical McNaughton — had lost his position through that piece of ill-advised wit.

On McNaughton's departure, Ursula had been promoted to his so-called office; proud enough she was to be there, too, and good work was she sending out from that dingy little corner of the big barn-like building. The discriminating few on the staff who knew a good thing when they saw it were growing to regard her as a young person to be reckoned with some day — as a young person who, in a modest way, was already beginning to "arrive."

Ursa looked up at the sound of Paul's voice. "Yes, this particular straggler may come in," she said, smiling, though a little while before her face had been grave enough. "The story for Saturday's paper is off my mind, and in W. D.'s hands" (in office parlance "W. D." was short for William Driscal); "and I was just thinking of leaving for home. Yes, take it," as Paul put out a covetous hand toward the big spicy carnation which stood in a glass of water on her desk.

"All right; if you 're going, I 'll walk up town with you," proposed the newcomer. He stuck the flower in his buttonhole, and taking a seat sidewise on the table, swung his foot and watched Ursula put on her hat and make her few preparations for leaving.

Like the rest of the Roses, Paul was good-looking. He had the full dome-shaped forehead of Felix; but there the resemblance ended, for Paul's eyes were bluer than those of his brother, and his hair was much lighter; in fact, almost as yellow as that of his twin sister, Mädel. He was taller than Felix, strongly built, and straight; his manner was gay, a little masterful, insouciant, attractive, and there was a merry twinkle in his eyes; but at this time his face bore marks of late hours and dissipation.

As Paul sat waiting, he softly whistled an air from the Meistersinger, and presently, with Ursula's penholder for a baton, began leading an imaginary orchestra. In the middle of Walter's beautiful song before the burghers he broke off abruptly. "I've handed in my last copy for Legare," he remarked suddenly. "He's well enough now to look after his own affairs. By the way, he'll have to skirmish around and find another 'under-study,' as he calls me, or else reform his ways, for I'm going 'o'er the border and far awa'' — to-morrow!"

"To-morrow!" exclaimed Ursula, turning swiftly upon him.

Paul nodded, tossed the pen aside, and got down from the table. "If you're ready, we'll go," he said, a little impatiently. "I've several things to tell you, and I can't in here, in this open-air 'coop,'" motioning to the partitions, which reached only halfway to the ceiling, "where every word that's said is heard all over the building! Let's

leave Mephisto to finish picking Driscal's bones in solitude; and we 'll get out."

"Don't hurry," he said, as they crossed City Hall Park. "We two may n't ever come this way again together."

"Why, Paul?" asked Ursula quietly. Every word of the story Francie had told her was clear in Ursa's memory, but she wanted to hear Paul's side of it.

"Because"—began Paul; snatching off his hat, with a sudden dexterous movement he caught under it a big yellow butterfly that was sailing by. "Is n't he a fine fellow?" He spread out the wings for Ursula's inspection; then went a few steps out of his way to put the insect on a shrub, returning to his companion, lightly dusting some pollen off his fingers. "Because," repeated Paul calmly, "the Faculty of Columbia College have had the impertinence to ask me to get out. In plainer English, I 've been expelled from college, and within a few weeks of graduation!"

"Oh, Paul! Paul!" exclaimed Ursula brokenly; and by her keen disappointment knew that in spite of what she had heard, she had been hoping against hope for something better than this.

"What a rackety, twisting, squirming crowd it is! We can't talk here," exclaimed Paul irritably. "Come this way." And turning from the wider thoroughfare, they made their way to a quiet back street.

The tall warehouses and offices were, most of them, closed for the day, a wagon or two lumbered

leisurely homeward, but pedestrians were few, and the two young people had the narrow sidewalk mainly to themselves.

"Now, tell me," Ursula said.

"Oh, it's the old story — I got in a scrape," answered Paul, shrugging his shoulders in an attempt at indifference. "I've been in worse scrapes, much worse," with a sly reminiscent smile, "the only difference being that this time I was caught." Then he looked at the grave girlish face so near his shoulder, and his own face grew serious. "I'll tell you something," he said, more earnestly than was his wont: "since we've been friends — you and I — I *have* tried to turn over a new leaf; this does n't look like it, but, all the same, I have. I promised you I'd give more attention to my work, and so I did — I studied hard. I *know* that if those old brutes had let me alone I'd have gone through with honors. Only a few weeks more; but, no! they must put the extinguisher on me! Well," — again he shrugged his shoulders, and returned to a lighter tone, — "there's no use crying over spilt milk, or wishing you'd not done this or the other, after the whole affair is over. The best thing for me now is to go into voluntary exile — to get out of New York and away to some other city where I can begin over again. But this finishes the lawyer business as far as I am concerned; that's one consolation! I'll go ahead now and follow my own bent — make music my life work. I've a friend in Cleveland who is looking up an organist's position for me.

He writes that he 's pretty sure he 's got just the place I 'd like; and I 'm starting for Cleveland to-morrow to find out if he 's right. If the place is what I think it is, I 'll have entire charge of the music — choir — all there is to it. Just the work I 'd love, and do my best in."

"What do your people say to your doing this? — your father who has been expecting so much of your abilities, and Felix, and your sister Nannie, Mrs. Derwent, who 's been almost a mother to you — do they approve of this step?" asked Ursula, in the gentle yet firm manner which was especially her own.

Paul had been fidgeting restlessly while she spoke. "Did n't ask 'em — don't intend to, either," he declared shortly, throwing up his handsome head and squaring his shoulders. "The truth is," he continued, in a gentler voice, "the family don't know of it yet. They won't until I'm gone. Then — er — a relative of mine will tell them. There would only be remonstrances, hard words, and interference from the pater and Felix; as it is, without a word they point a moral strongly to me by their own worthier examples; but, you know, everybody is n't built after the same prim pattern; and there 'd be sure to be reproaches and weepings from the women folk. And I don't feel like facing any of it; that sort of thing does n't mend matters one atom, and it 's mighty disagreeable. So I 'm going to skip it all! Besides, the news would fly around like wildfire — all our friends — everybody 'd know it. Some would sympathize — some

would pity, and I 'd feel like pommeling *them;* the majority would call me a black sheep; and all — *all*," Paul laughed, "every living one of 'em, would insist on remodeling my life for me, on his or her own particular lines. I would n't stand that, you know; consequently I 'd be forever in hot water, and simply lead a dog's life! No; I 'm going quietly away to-morrow morning — even Alan does n't know of it. He knows of the trouble at the college, but he would n't breathe a word of it as long 's I told him to keep mum. Poor old chap! he 'll be sorry to have me gone, though it 'll be the better for him. I have n't been a good example for him or anybody!" Paul's face clouded for a moment, then he threw his head up and began again, in a more cheerful voice.

"A musician is what I 'm going to be," he said, with feverish eagerness. "I 've always wanted to be one, since I was a little fellow, and the want has grown and strengthened with my growth. I 'll make a good thing of it, too, Ursula," turning to her, his eyes alight with enthusiasm. "You just see if I don't. I 'll try and get space on a paper for some musical comments, letters, etc., to keep my literary hand in; but mainly my time will be given to my choir, and to composing music. My brain is packed full of melodies — harmonies — good things! Just you wait until I have time to work some of them out! Perhaps after all the ugly duckling will turn out a swan, and as great an ornament to the family as brilliant Felix, or old sober-sides, plodding Jack. But I 'd like to

have got my sheepskin from the Alma Mater! Pretend as I may to the contrary, Ursula," Paul said abruptly, honestly, "I *am* cut up over this trouble!" His head still held its proud poise, but the gay boyish face grew set and stern, and tears, hot, infrequent tears, clouded the merry eyes.

"Oh, that Legare and his wicked, dissipated set — how I hate them!" cried Ursula, clinching her hands, and stiffening her body in her anger.

Paul looked pleased, but his eyebrows arched quizzically, while he regarded the girl's flushed face with an indulgent smile. "What a vindictive young person it is!" he said teasingly. "Why abuse poor Legare and nourish enmity against him and his friends? They could n't have made me go with them, or get into scrapes, unless I had chosen to do it. I 'm afraid I 've been a very willing victim. I 've only myself to blame for this."

"Then the more shame to you for it," was the gently spoken, sad, and very unexpected reply that came. The short street lined with closed warehouses through which they were passing was almost deserted, and, turning suddenly, Ursula laid her hand on her companion's sleeve, bringing him to a pause. "Paul, we have been friends a good while now," she said very earnestly, "and this may be our last walk together; it may be years before we even meet again, so let me say honestly out what is in my heart. You know" — this was said very winningly — "true friends can speak the truth to one another without fear of being misunder-

stood. That is one of the beauties and privileges of friendship. Paul, you have more ability than falls to most men, and it was n't given to you to waste. You know that."

"See here," broke in Paul, with what the Rose family designated as his "impudent" smile, — it was a very contagious smile, — "are you playing that I 'm a 'heathen Chinee' and you a missionary?"

"No, I 'm not," laughed Ursa, "and you 're not going to get out of your lecture either — don't you think that you are. Now, Paul, please listen! I 'm in earnest. With all the ability to do splendid things, you have simply dawdled through college — having a 'good time' that has n't been a good time at all. You *know* that Legare and his friends are not the people for you to be in with. They 're inferior to you in intellect and every other respect. You 've been just slipping through life in the easiest fashion, allowing all your opportunities to go by unused. Now, Paul, I 'm not going to let you continue treating my friend in that slipshod, aimless fashion. Do you know what that means?" She put her fingers lightly on Paul's hand, and, in spite of the teasing, quizzical eyes that were upon her, continued her subject bravely. "It means that I expect very different things from you in Cleveland. You understand, sir? — *very* different things — great things! You 've only to follow the best qualities in your nature — you 've got lots of good in you, Paul — and all will be well, — well with you, and with me, your Fidus

Achates. I've never blamed you for not wishing to be a lawyer, for I feel that you are really a musician born. But in the new life, do put your talent, which I believe to be God-given, to the very best use — the highest use. Keep my friend, Paul Rose, up to a high standard, and you 'll see how splendid will be the result. You've got genius, and fine, noble qualities — and, do you know," — Ursa broke off and looked up at her friend with admiration and pride in her eyes, — "do you know, Paul, I'm *sure*, that you're going to do well. I expect it of you — and I know you 'll not disappoint me."

The quiet confidence in Ursula's voice, her calm unshaken belief in him, was especially comforting to Paul just then; it appealed to the best in his nature. His hands closed upon Ursa's fingers. "You are right; I have wasted time, I have dawdled, I have frittered away my brains in low company," he admitted, with a frankness that surprised his friend — Paul was not given to self-depreciation. "And" — a firm ring came into his voice, his head went up — "you are also right in believing that I can and will do better. The college disgrace can't be undone — I suppose it 'll be cropping up all through my life! I must only live it down — that 's all. And in the career I 'm marking out for myself, I 'll really be at my best. I *will* try to deserve your good opinion. That 'll not be such an easy promise to keep as you might think, either," he added, with an emphatic nod; "for I've grown weak and flabby of will lately.

But I 've got some grit — stowed away somewhere in my composition, and that 'll have to come to the front. I 'll deserve your good opinion — that is, as far as in me lieth. You need never expect me to be the good little boy my estimable brother Jack is; we 're cast in different moulds." He broke off. "You 've been a dear good friend to me, Ursula," he said warmly; "even if," with a saucy laugh, "you *are* fond of lecturing me. It 's been awfully good of you interesting yourself in such a ne'er-do-well as I am. I 've looked forward to our walks and talks together from day to day, and"— his blue eyes looked gratefully at Ursula, then lighted up with fun. "See here," he added abruptly, smiling broadly, "did it ever occur to you that we two would never 've known one another so well, never 've grown to be friends, if Legare had n't cut up his little didos and I come to the Leader to fill his place? My calling at your house now and then would never 've made us the friends we are. We owe that to your *bête noir*, Legare." He loved to tease Ursula.

"Legare!" cried Ursa, making a saucy face at her companion; "indeed, 't is a Higher Power that brought that about, not that horrid, bad man. Well, I too am glad we met, Paul. I 've enjoyed your friendship immensely," she said brightly. "But what would Mrs. Derwent feel to hear her clever young brother, on whom she 's building such hopes, call himself a ne'er-do-well? You 're no such thing, sir. I won't have you call yourself that wretched name. This trouble has come because

you did n't have the courage to say 'No' to pleasure — because you did n't dream what it was leading you to. Now you 've learned a lesson — a sad, hard lesson, dear friend, that was n't in the college curriculum; and you 're going to put all the old weaknesses behind you, and learn to stand up straight upon your own feet. I know you are. Oh, the pride I shall take, in a very few more years, in my friend, the famous organist and composer, Mr. Paul Rose; perhaps it 'll be Doctor Rose by then — Doctor of Music; eh, Paul?" She laughed so blithely that Paul joined in the laugh.

"Don't you think you might write Mrs. Derwent a few lines before you go?" suggested this artful Ursula, following up the laugh, and still smiling. "Think how sad it 'll make her to have you away. She loves you so dearly, and you 've told me yourself that she 's been a good sister. To know that you thought of her at the last might help her a little to bear your absence. Just a line or two. Could n't you?"

There was a silence; Paul kicked a piece of orange peel off the sidewalk with unnecessary force. Then, "Oh, I suppose I could," he said presently, rather sulkily. "Nannie has been the best sister in the world," he added. "But there 's Max — *he* 'd have to know!"

"Well, what if he does? You don't mind that, do you? He 'd soon hear everything, anyway, you know," remarked Ursula sensibly. "I don't believe Mr. Derwent would think the less of you for remembering your sister, do you?" this very

innocently. "He has always seemed such a fine man."

"He *is* a fine man," returned Paul briefly, and began striding along at such a pace that Ursula had to drop into a brisk little trot to keep up with him. There was a frown on Paul's forehead as he swung along, his eyes looked gloomily, abstractedly, ahead.

"You must write to me, Paul," cheerfully observed the wise young friend beside him. "Just as soon as you 're settled and can do it comfortably, send me a nice long letter. Tell me about your life — your work, your room, the friends you make, and, especially, about the music you 'll be composing. I shall want to know *everything* about that. Of course I 'll answer. I 'll give you all the news of the office, and of home, and everything else I can think of. And please to remember, Mr. Paul Rose," — Ursa was as saucy as her scant breath would allow, — "that you 'll not get long letters unless you send long letters. See?"

For answer her companion gave a sort of grunt; and they hurried along for some distance in silence. Then, with a start, Paul suddenly roused himself, and unconsciously slackened his pace. "Well! I *am* a selfish animal!" he declared with compunction. "All this time I've been gabbling of my own affairs! Tell me something of yourself. Anything new in your home world?"

"Yes; two important somethings," answered Ursula readily. "Margaret has ended her engagement with Mr. Austin."

"Oh, ho! she has, eh?" observed Paul, with interest. "Well; I'm not surprised. Austin's a nice enough fellow; but a man of his age — and such a puny specimen at that — had no business to expect to carry off a beautiful girl like your sister Margaret. I think she's done a wise thing! What's the other piece of news?"

"One in which you come in for a share — you may know of it already — Frances is engaged to your brother, Jack," announced Francie's sister. "Isn't it odd that the two events should have come together — one upon the heels of the other?"

Paul started away from Ursula's side in wide-eyed astonishment. "*What!*" he cried incredulously. "Well! of all the bold beggars! There's no earthly reason why Jack should n't engage himself and get married," he added presently, still with surprise in his tones. "But, somehow, he's the last person in the world I expected to hear had done it. So Miss Frances is to be my sister-in-law; Jack's in luck." But there was a slight note of bitterness in Paul's voice; his own disappointment rose up again before him, and Ursula guessed it.

"I think it'll be a long engagement," she said quietly, "as your brother is not at present in a position to support a wife. But they're both young; they can wait. I don't know if all your family have been told of the event," she added, "but Mrs. Erveng knows, and Mrs. Derwent. They called on Francie yesterday."

"Can't afford to marry?" cried Paul. "Why

not? Jack's salary from the Leader is n't a large income, but I know he has money saved, and besides, his books bring him in a little something" — A sudden stinging recollection enlightened his mind, turning him red and very warm, and bringing with it a wave of feeling in which was humiliation, an unusual sense of gratitude, and, what was far less frequent with Paul Rose, of distinct and genuine disfavor with himself. "I know why he never told me of his engagement," Paul said slowly, in a tone so conscience-stricken that Ursula knew at once where his thoughts had gone.

"All things, good or bad, have an ending — here we are at home," she said, as they reached the Jeffreys' house. "And," lowering her voice as they ascended the steps, "there is some one ahead of us."

The "some one" was a man, peering at the names over the bells, which were indistinct in the dim, as yet unlighted vestibule. As the two young people entered, the man turned to meet them, lifting his gray hat with a flourish; he prided himself on that bow.

"I am looking for a family of the name of Jeffrey. I've rung a bell, but am not sure it is theirs. Can you tell me if they live here?" he asked.

"The Jeffreys live at the top of the house," Ursula informed him.

"That you, Harwood? Why, wherever did you spring from, into this part of the world?" exclaimed Paul, at sight of the man's face.

The musical director did not look overpleased at the meeting. "I 'm on a matter of business," he answered stiffly. "I might ask, what 're *you* doing here?"

But just then the front door sprang open with a click, and Mr. Harwood hastily slid himself within it.

"That fellow runs a light-opera-general-variety theatre, that 's very popular, but he himself is as unscrupulous an individual as could be found anywhere," remarked Paul. "He 's one of Legare's cronies; and he 's treated the old man badly, too. He is n't to be trusted. Bear that in mind, if any of you people have dealings with him. Look out for trickery!"

"I can't imagine what he can 've come for," Ursula said uneasily; she never thought of connecting this man with Francie's adventure in the park.

Paul put out his hand. "Well — I won't keep you any longer," he said abruptly, then stood holding Ursa's hand in a firm clasp. "I 've another incentive to do my best in Cleveland," he added. "I owe a big debt of more than gratitude to Jack. Jack 's a good fellow, most unselfish — as men go; your sister might have done worse than to take him. I 've an account to settle with Jack, first thing. And there 's your good opinion of me to be justified. Large contracts to fill — eh? Tell you what, Ursula, you 're a pretty brave girl to have faith in me after all you know! If I ever amount to anything, you will 've had a

big hand in the doing of it. Well — I can only do my best. Good-by!"

"I know you — therefore I believe in you," answered Ursula; she had to cough to cover the fluttering of her breath in her throat. "Now don't forget — a few lines to Mrs. Derwent. And one line — just one, Paul — to your sister Mädel — your twin sister. Ah — please!"

"Oh, you wheedler!" cried Paul, shaking his finger at her. "If that is n't like a woman! Give her an inch" —

"I'm equal to asking for a good deal more than an ell," broke in Ursa saucily. "That 's letting you off very easily. You 'll do it, Paul?" She gave his hand a little shake to make him answer her.

Paul smiled down indulgently upon her. "Yes, I'll write Mädel a line," he said presently, "and — I'll not write to Nannie" — He paused.

"Oh, Paul!" exclaimed Ursula, sharp disappointment in her voice.

"I 'll not write to Nannie," repeated Paul teasingly, "but I 'll go and see her this evening, confess everything, and have a good talk with her."

"You dear boy! Oh, I'm so pleased!" cried Ursula, in delighted incoherency; "that 's ten thousand times better. You 're a great tease, sir, that 's what you are. Paul, stoop your head." As he wonderingly did so, Ursa put her hands upon his shoulders and kissed him lightly on his forehead. "There!" she said hurriedly, blushing scarlet in the dim light, "that 's for what you 're

going to do and be — from the friend who believes in you, with all her heart. Good-by, Paul; good-by, dear friend! God bless you!"

"Amen!" eagerly responded Paul. "Ursula" —

But the door had sprung open again, and Ursula was gone.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SWEETENER OF LIFE

"UNCLE GABE, do see him for me," eagerly begged Frances, when told of Mr. Harwood's arrival. "I don't want to sing in his opera, I would n't for anything he could offer me. And I could n't, anyhow, now that I 've written Mr. Custis, accepting his offer. I don't know what possessed me to give that man my address. You go in and see him for me, won't you?"

"Yes, Gabriel, do go," urged Mrs. Jeffrey uneasily; and, "If he makes any trouble, shout, and I 'll come help you annihilate him," supplemented Basil, who was at the house.

But the musical director refused to accept uncle Gabriel's settlement of the matter.

"My offer was made to Miss Jeffrey herself, and from her, and no other, will I take my answer," he declared, getting very red in the face, and glaring at the little clergyman. "I 'm offering her a fine start in life — the best she could have — and I can't believe she 'd be foolish enough to throw all that over to sing in a church for a paltry four hundred a year!"

Mr. Kincaid drew himself up. "Sir," he remarked with dignity, "money is not the only con-

sideration in the world. My niece *prefers* to sing in a church; and no offer on your part will move her from her decision."

"If this is your doing, sir, it 's a great piece of injustice to your niece," fumed the manager, striding about the small drawing-room, "the greatest you could do her, and shows a narrow-mindedness I did n't expect from the cloth, sir. No, sir, I did n't, not in these enlightened days. I 've sent Miss Jeffrey my credentials, from the best people in this city, showing that everything 's square and above board with me, and I can't understand her refusal. Unless" — wheeling round, he eyed uncle Gabriel with suspicion — "unless some one else has made her a bigger offer." He mistook the little man's astonished silence for confusion.

"I tell you what I 'll do," he cried. "There 's nothing mean about me; I offered Miss Jeffrey thirty-five dollars a week to begin with — I 'll make it forty! Forty, sir, cash down, every week. If that is n't generous toward a beginner, tell me what is! Better clinch the bargain at once."

Uncle Gabriel stroked his shaven chin, and looked curiously at the blatant speaker. "I don't think it would make any difference if you offered fifty dollars," he said quietly. "But I 'll call the young lady and let her speak for herself."

"Ha! that 's fetching him! Thought it would," reflected Mr. Harwood, congratulating himself on his shrewdness.

In a few minutes Mr. Kincaid returned with

Frances, whom the musical director met with effusive politeness; but he was a good deal disconcerted at the sight of Basil Fabrey, who followed closely upon her steps.

"Ah — how do!" Basil said, with an air of careless condescension, barely acknowledging the manager's bow. "Well, Harwood," he continued, in the same lordly tone, and lounging against the piano, — no one sat down, — "what 's all the fuss? What 're you bothering my cousin about?"

"I did n't know she was your cousin," exclaimed Harwood. A good deal of his assurance appeared to have deserted him, and he kept glancing uneasily at young Fabrey as Mr. Kincaid repeated to Frances the last offer that had been made her.

"H'm! That 's a pretty good offer," commented Basil. "Business must be flourishing; guess I 'll call upon you, Harwood."

"It 's an investment, Mr. Fabrey," urged the manager, a little whine coming into his voice. "No business can thrive without some outlay of money."

"It 's extremely liberal of you to make me a still larger offer," Francie said, feeling very brave between her two defenders, "but I would not be willing to accept it should you even offer me a hundred dollars a week. I 've nothing against you," she hastened to add (she had not yet heard Ursula's report); "in fact, I 'm very much obliged for all the advice you 've given me, and your interest in my voice. But I 've decided to sing in a church."

"You 're making a mistake — a *big* mistake!" cried Mr. Harwood, throwing out one hand in a gesture of remonstrance while with the other he mopped his warm red face. "You 're just burying your talents."

"I don't say I never will sing in opera, for I'd love to, and I may — some day, years from now. I can't tell what I shall do." Frances colored up; she was thinking of Jack's speech that afternoon in the park, and of the changed conditions of her life. "But at present I intend to sing in a church — on that point I am quite decided."

"Then there 's no use in my staying on here," declared Harwood, taking up his hat. "I 'll only add that the offer remains open, miss. Whenever you feel like going in for a career, drop a line to the address on this card" — he laid one on the table — "and I 'll call at once. I bid you all good-day!" With a flourish of the gray hat, he passed out into the public hall.

Mr. Kincaid stood at the drawing-room door, but Basil followed the musical director to the head of the steps. The young man's long jaw was set firmly; his brows met in a heavy frown above the light watchful eyes. "See here, Harwood," he said sternly, "this business is settled now and for always. Just bear that in mind. No annoying of Miss Jeffrey, or I'll send my lawyer to call upon you — You know what that means!"

Harwood would have greatly enjoyed laying violent hands upon young Fabrey, but for cogent reasons of his own, swallowed his wrath. "You

should n't be hard on a man for being enterprising. I was n't to know she was your cousin," he remarked sulkily.

"So you know him," observed uncle Gabriel, as Basil joined him.

"Know him! I should think I did — the rascal! He owes me a pile of money — that I can't get a cent of!" answered the new cousin incautiously.

"A pile of money!" repeated uncle Gabe, looking puzzled. "Why, I thought" —

"*Tcha!*" exclaimed Basil, snapping his fingers with impatience at his own slip, and scowling fiercely. "Oh, it 's a long story — I 'll tell it all to you some time soon," he added hastily. "But in the mean while oblige me by not saying anything about it to the family."

One pleasant afternoon, some weeks later, Judith made her way up the narrow creaking stairs of a tenement house, and along the dark hall to a door, on which she knocked — bell there was none. Almost immediately the door was opened by a tall fair girl dressed in black, whose sad face brightened at sight of the other girl.

"Oh, Miss Judith! I 'm awful glad to see you!" she exclaimed; and then two big tears came running down her pale cheeks.

Judy's arm went round the narrow shoulders, and she kissed the girl warmly. "Why did n't you send for me, Louise? I 've only just heard of your father's death and burial," she said.

"It was so suddent" — Louise's voice failed. Then warmly, "Come in the parlor, Miss Judith, come in," she urged. "I know mama 'll be glad to see you."

Though the Laidlers had but recently been added to Judy's "visiting" list, they were a family among her poor people for whom she had a high regard as well as liking. The small front room into which Louise now ushered her was in the same state of perfect neatness as it had been on all of Judy's previous visits. The "parlor suit" of red cotton velvet, plentifully decorated with crocheted tidies, was set stiffly against the wall; on the narrow, bright-covered mantel-board stood a family fetich in the shape of a bunch of skeletonized leaves under a tall glass shade; a small marble-topped table held its place in the centre of the room, with a crocheted scarf threaded with blue and yellow ribbons lying across it, and on this much admired piece of handiwork was the family album, a large affair with heavy gilt clasps, and on each corner a good-sized gilt knob on which the book rested.

Yet there were changes in the room since Judy was last there, and her eyes quickly took note of them. On a table in one corner was a sheaf of wheat tied in the middle with a black ribbon; over the father's picture, which hung on the wall, a slender bit of crape was draped, and the comfortable, chintz-covered old chair in which the invalid had sat for so many years had been moved from its customary place in the window, and now stood

empty against the wall. Between the windows was a low frame, — of the kind used in making fringes, — and from it hung loose strands of gay-colored silk.

"I could n' leave mama this week, an' they was that good at the factory they sent up my work," Louise explained, with a glance at the frame. "We 're jus' rushed with orders now to the factory — so the work had to be done!"

"Go on working while we talk," suggested Judith.

But with "I 'd best call mama first," Louise left the room.

In a very few minutes she was back, and with her came a little, plump woman, heavy eyed and sad of face, yet pretty, and looking hardly old enough to be more than elder sister to tall, serious Louise. Behind the mother and daughter walked a little fair-haired girl of about ten, and a very delicate misshapen boy of eight. The children seated themselves on two of the chairs ranged against the wall, and from there gazed solemnly and unremittingly at the visitor.

"Yes, ma'am, it vass awful suddent to de last," Mrs. Laidler said sadly in reply to a remark from Judy. She spoke in a low, very quiet voice, and in broken English. "Pappa haff been sick dat long — ailin' und ailin' all de time, und yet holdin' on — dat we neffer t'ought he 'd go so quvick. It vass seventeen year ago pappa get hurt. He vass on a ladder, und it fell mit 'im, und proke his rib — und de proken piece off dat rib stick into de

lungs. He vass very sick for two years; den de doctor say he can go back to vork, und pappa vent. De chil'ren vass li'l', und de money ve 'd save vass mos' gone — he vass awful glad to get to vork again. But" — she shook her head sadly — "before von veek vass out dey had to pring 'im home mit bleedin' off de lungs. Und it vass so from dat day — he haff not de strengk to vork, dough he try und try — pappa vass not lasey. Efen dose pickshurs," she pointed to the large framed photographs hanging on the opposite wall, "he vould heng dem up; und vhen he finish, dere vass de bleedin' back again. He haff a cough, a very bad cough — und dat get vorse und vorse — undtil" — The widow made a slight, pathetic gesture with the hands lying loosely clasped in her lap, and a tear ran down her face.

"We did n' know he was so sick — worse 'n usual," Louise said, glancing up from the gay silks, in and out of which her nimble fingers were flying. "Papa was never the one to complain."

"Neffer — neffer!" exclaimed the mother earnestly. "Mos' people vhat is sick — sick — all de time vill get cross und — vhat, Visa?" She looked inquiringly at her American daughter.

"Selfish, mama," supplied Louise.

"Yes — but he vass neffer dat," went on the little woman, not trusting herself with the word, of which she knew the meaning but not the pronunciation. "Dere vass n' a petter, kinder man in all dis city dan mein Wilhelm! He haff de best heart! He vass so 'fraid off giffin' drouble — efen

to me! Vhen his strengk go und he can do notting else, he sit in dat chair," she pointed to the empty one against the wall, "day in, day out, sick or vell, und make baskets und cane chairs — to pring in a penny. He neffer grumble, dough he vass alway in pain — und neffer go out for de valks or goot times. Und it vorry him — vorry him all de time dat he pe a purden on me und de *kinder.* But he vass neffer a purden — neffer. He say, 'Oh, mama, you vork so hard!' but I feel not like I vork at all — for I haff pappa mit me. Now vill pe de hard vork! No voman haff a petter man dan me — no chil'ren haff a petter *vater* dan dese. Ain't dat so, Visa?"

"That's so, mama," answered Louise, pausing in her work long enough to brush a tear from her cheek. The eyes of the little boy were fixed upon his mother, his pale face intent; but the girl broke out in a sob, which, however, was quickly silenced by a few words from Louise, who called her to her side.

"You mus' n' cry out loud like that, Tilly," Louise said, in a low voice. "Mama feels awful bad — you mus' n' make her feel worse. You know papa always say we mus' be good to mama after he's gone. Go sit over there on the lounge, — back of mama, — then she can't see you cry. An' don' make no noise."

Judy heard the whispered words, and saw the weeping child slip gently into the little corner behind her mother. But the widow neither saw nor heard what was transpiring around her, her

thoughts were with the dear one who had passed away from earth. It seemed a relief to her to talk; and Judith listened in the most sympathetic silence.

"Efrey now und den, pappa haff spells — mit de pain in de lungs," Mrs. Laidler went on. "Und vhen ve sen's for de doctor for him dis time, li'l' did I tream he vass goin' to leaf me! Vhen he haff de spells, he sleep here," she put out a little work-roughened hand and touched caressingly the cot-lounge on which she sat, "to haff more air — und here he died! De doctor come late dat night. I ask him, 'How iss he?' He say, 'He iss very sick, but I t'ink he pull t'rough.' Dat 's vhat he say most times when pappa be ill. I sit up mit pappa dat night." The widow's eyes were fixed upon the floor, and the quiet tears that rolled down her cheeks fell unheeded upon the hands in her lap. "I t'ought he vass sleepin'; den he open his eyes. 'Mama,' he say, off a suddent, 'le' me put mein head on your shoulder?' I say, 'Vhy, pappa, cert'nly!' He put his head down heavy, like a *müdes kind*, und he hol' mein han'. 'Visa,' he say, 've haff been happy togedder — ain't ve?' Mein heart gif a big yump — I get 'fraid — he haff not call me 'Visa' since our Hans vass a baby; und he is now twenty-t'ree, und vorkin' out in Colorado — mit his lungs. I say, 'Yes, dear pappa, ve haff been very happy togedder!' Den he talk of vhen ve vass young und he vass courtin' me. I vass a maid in de house of his employer" — the heavy, tear-swollen eyes were lifted to Judith for

an instant, then sank again,—"und Wilhelm come dere to heng pickshurs und a *spiegel*—vhat you call lookin'-glass — dat vass his pusiness. Ve vass bote from de *Vaterland*— ve vass bote lonely — I vass heavy mit mein heart"—

"She means sad," put in Louise softly.

"But vhen he love me, I vass happy— ach!" The hands in the widow's lap tightened their hold on each other. "I haff much to t'ank God for. He haff gif me a goot man dat haff love me vell. 'Ah,' he say dat las' night, 'if I only could haff been a well man, mama, und not a purden to you, I could haff make a goot vages und lef' you somet'ing. I been a great care to you, mama — und you neffer grumble — you neffer scold mit me 'cause I not pring in de money.' 'Pappa, pappa! Wilhelm, *mein liebe!*' I say, und I cry. 'It iss not money dat makes de life sweet,' I say; 'it iss de love — und dat ve haff — you und me. You neffer haff been a purden to me — *neffer!* Und how you say so?' I ask him. 'Who iss it haff pring up de chil'ren so vell und so vise, und make dem to t'ink off God, und be honest — vass dat I? Und who does all de t'ings roun' de house, und safes de li'l' *weibe* t'ousand steps, und prings de laugh for her vhen she's tired — ain't dat you? Und who gets up in de night vhen de *kinder* be sick, und vill not vake me; who shut all de vinders in de shtorm und vill not let me go near dem, for fear I catch cold — ain't dat you? Ah, pappa, you haff been goot to me like I vass your chile as vell 's your vife. I haff been *very* happy mit you!'

Und I kiss him. He say, 'Mama, I feel petter — I t'ink I vill shleep now — pest I go pack to de lounge.' He say dat 'cause he t'ink I vass tired holdin' 'im. But I say, 'No, pappa, you shleep vhere you are — I like dat petter.' He say notting, but he kiss me right — here," Mrs. Laidler raised one hand to the short full white throat left bare by the low collar of her black calico dress, and designated a spot just below her left ear. "He kiss me here. Den he shleep — but only a little vhile. He voke mit a great shtart und called out loud, 'Mama, dere iss a Gott im himmel — I leaf you mit Him!' Dat vass all — mein man vass gone!" She sat with bent head, the tears pouring down her cheeks, but with no sob or sound of grief.

The little girl on the corner of the lounge was rocking herself to and fro in a passion of sorrow, smothering her sobs as best she could; Louise and Judith were weeping; but in the eyes of the boy were no tears. Getting down deliberately from his chair, he walked over to his mother, and took her hand in his clawlike fingers.

"Mama," he cried, in a shrill quavering voice, "I be Wilhelm, like papa, — *I'll* take care er you now he's gone."

The bold promise was so at variance with the child's appearance — the abnormally large head connected with the misshapen shoulders by the merest thread of a neck, the stick-like, rickety legs, the pinched white face — that Judy's lips took on curves of tender pity, and, in the midst of her tears, Louise smiled.

But the mother saw only the brave spirit shining in her little lad's eyes. "Ja; dat you vill, mein Villie," she said gratefully, passing an arm around the boy and pressing him to her side. "He iss pappa's own chile — he 's got pappa's prains," she continued proudly, turning to the visitor, and wiping her wet eyes as she spoke. "Ve haff fife, all goot chil'ren; pappa haff train dem vell. But Villie iss de mos' like pappa mit de pooks — eh, Visa?"

"Yes, he 's awful smart in learnin'," corroborated Louise, with a glance of pride at her small brother, who received these compliments calmly.

"You should keep him out of doors as much as possible," Judith advised. "He does n't look strong."

"Ah," — the mother's tone grew anxious, — "none off de *kinder* iss strong. Hans, de big son, goes to lif in Colorado — mit his lungs; he iss a goot son, *unser* Hans, he sen' money to me und pappa efrey mont', mitout fail. Visa iss not shtrong in de t'roat — she have to be careful. It vass pappa alvays sayin', 'Vear de rubbers, Visa; vear de rubbers, und not get de col'.' You haff to t'ink off dat now for yourself, *mein kind!* Fritz come nex' to Visa. He iss in a grocery store, und a steady goot boy. But he begin to cough — like Hans! Pappa vass writin' to Hans 'bout Fritz — ah! who vill settle all dose t'ings for us now!" Mrs. Laidler's lips quivered; and it was a few minutes before the quiet voice could resume its remarks.

"Nex' to Fritz come Tilly," she put her hand

back and touched the knee of her little daughter. "Den come mein Villie."

"He did ought to be out er doors — the doctor tell us that all the time," Louise said, with a grave glance at the crippled child. "But there ain't no park for blocks an' blocks 'round here; an' we can't sen' Willie out on the sidewalk to play. He 'd get hurt. There 's horse-cars goin' through the street all the time, an' the boys is that crowded together they might knock Willie down right in front of the horses — without meaning to. They have knocked 'im down as it is, on the sidewalk — an' hurt him. He 's 'fraid er them; he 'd ruther stay in the house an' read."

"I ain't afraid of them, but they 're bigger 'n me," broke in Willie, anxious to sustain a reputation for valor.

"Many 's the time — 'fore papa got so he could n' go up an' down the steps — that he 'd 'a' gone out to a park an' set there with Willie," went on Louise, with an amused glance at the small boy, "but there ain't no parks anywheres 'round here!" She sighed.

"Do you know where Dedlock Street is?" asked Judy, a happy light springing into her eyes.

"Dat iss not far." "That 's near here," replied the mother and daughter.

"Well, there 'll soon be a beautiful, big playground there, for the children," cried Judith brightly. "Houses are now being pulled down to make a large space, — some rich kind people have given the money for it, — a space where boys can

fly kites, and play marbles, and spin tops," she added, addressing Wilhelm, who stared solemnly back at her. "There 'll be heaps of sand to dig in, and build caves in. And, by and by, in time, there 'll be trees, and flowers, and a fountain on the playground — all for the boys and girls, their very *own!*" Judy's cheeks had grown pink as she talked of the fruition of her cherished project, her face radiant. Louise looked at her friend with rapt girlish admiration.

"When that is finished, there 'll be no necessity for Willie to run the risk of being hurt on the sidewalk, as he can go to the playground and enjoy himself in perfect safety, and Tilly, too," Judy said, patting the hand of the little girl, whose eyes were red, and whose breath still came with a slight catch in it.

"Well, ain't that lovely!" cried Louise. "What a relief that 'll be 'bout Willie, mama."

"Yes, the playground will be a great comfort and enjoyment; more than that, a splendid and enduring blessing," remarked Judith gratefully. "Now," she added, turning to the mother, "tell me what you think of doing; shall you stay on here?"

Walking slowly homeward in the bright summer afternoon, Judy's thoughts were filled with the widow's pathetic story. For seventeen years the man had been ill, most of the time in great pain, and rarely able, though always willing, to do any work that could add much to the support of his

family. Times had been very hard in the home; for years the little wife had been the bread-winner, until the boys and girl were old enough to earn something. It had been a long siege — seventeen years with a fretful, ailing man, growing steadily worse every day. Yet there had been peace and happiness in the household, and at the end no sense of relief, but only of heavy, aching loss, only a great yearning for the continued presence of one who had, with some show of justice, considered himself a burden upon wife and children. Why was this?

"Ah, she was right, that little woman," mused Judith, lifting her eyes to the clear blue sky above the tree-tops. "'T is love that is the sweetener of life, not money! She has a right to be thankful; with poverty, sickness, hard work, God has yet given her the best sort of love, the love that lasts through the dark seasons as well as the bright, and grows stronger, closer, through all! Not everybody has that sort of love. Mother and father had it; I think Francie and Jack have a love like that. Marnie — ah, poor Marnie! I wonder if I" —

"Judy!" said a gentle voice, a hand closed around her arm, and with a start Judy awoke from her reverie to find her mother at her elbow.

"Why, mother!" exclaimed the girl. "Why — it 's nearly tea time — where 're you going?"

A faint smile relieved the anxiety in Mrs. Jeffrey's face. "Yes; but your uncle Gabriel has n't reached home yet, or I would have had him go

with me," she remarked irrelevantly. "Basil is n't well — in fact, he has met with an accident — been thrown from his bicycle, and taken to a hospital. The surgeon has telegraphed me of the accident — at Basil's request, I suppose. And I am going right up to see the poor fellow. I don't even know his mother's address — do you?"

"No," answered Judy very quietly and steadily; she had grown a little pale. "Mother, may n't I go with you?" she asked. "He 's our cousin, you know."

The quick mother-eyes had seen the sudden pallor; perhaps it did not surprise her.

"But at home — they will be expecting you," she said hesitatingly.

"I 'll run home and tell the girls that I 'm going with you," Judy proposed composedly. "Sit on this bench, mother dear, and wait for me; I won't be long." And away she sped.

CHAPTER XV

REVELATIONS

"I 'm happy to say that Mr. Fabrey is in no danger whatever, though in pain, and a good deal shaken up by his fall. It may be some time, however, before he can be about again; but you may be sure that we shall do everything that is possible to make him comfortable here." So the house physician of the hospital (to whom the superintendent had handed them over) suavely informed Mrs. Jeffrey and Judith. "Certainly you may see him, and whenever you like," he added. "Allow me to show you to the elevator — this way, please."

"Two such polite men!" remarked Mrs. Jeffrey, as she and Judy were being swiftly lifted to an upper story. "I had an idea that the officials in a hospital were always too busy to devote so much time and politeness to a man as poor as Basil. Poor boy! Too bad this accident should 've occurred now, just as he has a position, after months of looking for one and failing! About two weeks ago since he got it, is n't it?"

"Since he told us, but he said he 'd had the position for some time before that," amended Judy. Then a nurse came forward and led them to a large, comfortable room where lay Basil.

With a strip of adhesive plaster across one cheek, a bandage round his head, and his left arm in splints, the young man was a sorry enough looking objeet. He was lying with his face toward the wall, and turned slowly at the sound of Mrs. Jeffrey's voice. "It 's so kind of you to come, cousin Etta," he commenced languidly; then he caught sight of Judith behind her mother, and his whole face changed, light sprang into his heavy eyes and a tinge of color into his cheeks, out of which a good deal of the bronze was gone.

"Judy!" he cried. His sunny smile flashed out, and the fingers of his well hand closed firmly upon the hand Judith held out. "I 've been longing to see you, but I hardly dared hope you 'd come," he whispered eagerly, and watched with keen delight the rush of soft red that flooded the girl's face and ears.

Afraid to trust her voice just then, Judy patted the back of Basil's hand; then, to his disappointment, quietly disengaged her fingers from his clasp, and took a seat several feet away from him.

"How did it happen? And what a mercy you were n't killed!" observed Mrs Jeffrey, who had a warm liking for "Maria's boy," as she was apt to call young Fabrey.

"Blamed if I know!" remarked Basil, inelegantly, but with energy. "I was riding along as smoothly as anybody could wish to go; and thinking pleasant thoughts, too," with a meaning glance at Judy, "when — phew!" — he made a rapid upward movement of his hand — "first thing I knew

I was flying through the air, and landing on a pile of stones! Tell you! rapid transit is n't in it with the speed at which I went. I remember striking the stones — they were n't soft, either! — then nothing more until I opened my eyes here, and the doctors were putting the pieces of me together again. One ankle is sprained, too — nothing like doing a thing thoroughly, you know! Now here I am — a prisoner for weeks!"

"And just as you 've got that position," said Mrs. Jeffrey regretfully. "I do hope the firm will keep it open for you. I wish I had a spare room in our flat, Basil; I 'd have you taken there as soon as you could be moved. I 'm afraid this will cost you a good deal, my dear," the kind little woman went on, with a glance around the airy comfortable room in which the young man was lodged. "Could n't we make some other arrangement for you? I know there are much less expensive accommodations in a hospital than this room, and if you 're to be here weeks" —

Basil's face had got red; the scowl which came so readily was in full possession of as much of his forehead as could be seen below the bandage. "That 's all right, cousin Etta," he broke in hastily and decidedly. "Soon 's I came to consciousness I sent for a friend — an intimate friend — who lives here in the city" — Basil might as well have mentioned that the friend was Jim Ivors, but he did n't — "and *he* 's running this affair for me. He knows the state of my finances, and I 'm not afraid that he 'll go beyond them. If this mounts

up too high, perhaps I 'll be moved into another, less expensive room. He 'll see to everything. But I just wish you did have an extra room at the house," he went on, "and would take me in. I 'd be only too glad to put myself under your wing; would n't I be in clover, though!" The grateful, really affectionate glance he gave Mrs. Jeffrey effectually soothed any annoyance that lady might have felt at her advice not having been taken. But there came a slightly puzzled expression into Judy's eyes.

"An intimate friend," she repeated. "I thought you had no intimate friends in New York but ourselves. You 've never told us of this one. And is he going to write to your mother about your accident?"

"He promised to," replied the young man readily. "Have n't I told you of my friend?" he added, in an undertone, as Mrs. Jeffrey rose and went to the other end of the room to speak to the nurse. "Some day, pretty soon, I 'll tell you all about my friends — and everything there is to tell about myself." He smiled at Judy; but perhaps there was a little condescension in his tone, for that young person's head took a poise that Basil knew of old, and did not relish.

"Oh, excuse me; I 've no desire to pry into your affairs," she remarked, in a tone of proud apology. "I spoke on the impulse of the moment."

"Now, Judy, drop that sort of talk!" cried Basil warmly, raising himself on his uninjured elbow, his light eyes meeting, half angrily, half

imploringly, the steady gaze of Judy's soft brown ones. "You know very well that I 'm only too glad to have you interested in my affairs. I 've made no secret of it that I care more for you than for any other woman in the whole world. You know my heart belongs to you, but you always evade me. You keep me off; you won't give me even one word of — of assurance — to encourage me! I know why it is" — Basil was in great earnest, his voice shook, a bright spot of red came into each pale bronzed cheek — "I know why 't is; you look upon me as a poor unfortunate fellow that 'll never be able to make a way in the world. You 're afraid to trust your life in my keeping, because I have n't money, like Austin, and a little-tin-god-on-wheels reputation like that Rose fellow!" (Basil could not get rid of a lurking jealousy of the Jeffreys' strong liking for Jack.) "A poor devil without money or brains need never expect to win a girl's love!" He broke off abruptly, and sinking back on his pillows, turned his face away. Judy could see the hopeless droop of his lips.

Moving noiselessly to her mother's empty chair beside the bed, Judith slipped her cool fingers into the brown hand that lay thrown out upon the coverlet. "Basil!" she said softly.

The next instant the fingers were in a tight grip, and Basil was on his elbow facing her, his blue eyes piercing in their eager intensity. "You realize what this means to you and to me?" he cried breathlessly, almost sternly. "No need to

tell you of my love, Judy, you 've known that for a long time — I 've made no secret of it. The question is, do you love me well enough to share poverty with me, perhaps for all your life? I could n't make a fortune, to save my neck, though I might be able to earn a very moderate salary. You know that would mean living in the plainest way, — no fine frocks and diamonds and folderols, — but just jogging along from day to day — humdrum — you and I — face to face with economy, perhaps poverty, all our days — through dark times and bright times — through sickness and health. Sounds like the marriage service, does n't that? But there 's truth in it; 't is n't all plain sailing in married life any more than it is in other ways of living. Could you give me a love that would be equal to all that, Judy?" His eyes searched the flushed, drooping face.

There was a little silence, then Judy lifted her honest eyes to him. "After all, it 's love that makes life sweet and worth living, not money," she said dreamily, with a tenderness in her voice that Basil had never heard there before for himself. "I 'm not afraid of poverty with you," she added; and the passionate love-light that sprang into Basil's eyes set her heart thrilling.

"Tell it to me in plain English; say right out, 'Basil, I love you!'" he insisted. "I 'm such an ugly, unmannerly, ignorant kind of brute, and you 're so dainty, so graceful, so clever, I can't believe my own good luck. Tell it to me, Judy. Say it."

Judy gave a low rippling happy laugh. "What unusual humility!" she teased. Then, "Well, you insatiable person, since you will have it" — She loosened her lover's clasp, and took his hand between her own two. "Basil," she said, looking up at him with shining eloquent eyes, in which was also more than a gleam of mischief, — "Basil," she repeated, and then softly, archly, uttering each letter with slow, tender distinctness, and little pauses between the words, she spelled, "I — l-o-v-e — y-o-u!" —

"You darling!" cried Basil, in a rapturous whisper, throwing out his hand for Judy's shoulder, and holding up an eager pair of lips. But his grasp found only the empty air, his lips received no kiss, for the maiden had slipped from under his hand.

In the chair which she had first occupied, several feet away, there sat Judy again, a trifle out of breath from her rapid return, flushed as pink as a rose, and most demure.

For a moment Basil looked undecided whether to laugh or to get angry; then, "Ah, Judy, come back," he begged. "Just once! Ah, come."

"Thank you, but I get a much better view of you from here," was the saucy reply.

"Yes — you think that 's kind? — sit there and make fun of a poor battered wreck of a creature?" he asked in an injured tone, which, however, soon became imploring. "Say, Judy, come — won't you? You exasperating girl!" he suddenly broke out, as Judy sat smiling at him. "Just you wait till I 'm up again!"

"That's exactly what I intend to do. I always knew you were a reasonable person," laughed Judy.

Just then Mrs. Jeffrey walked a step or two in the direction of the invalid, as if returning to her chair, then retraced her steps to ask the nurse another question which had occurred to her; and Basil immediately made one more effort.

"D'you remember that last spring you asked me to teach wood-carving to some boys in a night school on the East Side? Well, I did it." His tone signified the high estimate in which he held his services. "I did n't tell you anything about it, but I went over twice a week regularly until the school closed. I did a good deal for some of those boys" — Basil caught himself. "Now, don't I deserve something for doing all that? Come over here!"

"I knew it long ago," Judy said composedly. "The principal of the school told me."

"And you never said a word to me — not one word!" cried the wood-carver in wrathful amazement.

"Virtue should be its own reward. People should do good deeds because they are there to be done — and *not* for praise," declared Judy loftily, hunching her shoulders and pulling down the corners of her laughing mouth, while she threw mischievous glances at the new cousin.

Young Fabrey scowled, then the laugh which he could no longer control had its way. "Oh, you humbug!" he exclaimed. "When I get on

my feet again, I 'll pay you off for this! Cousin Etta," he complained, as that lady approached, "what do you think? Judy 's promised to marry me — says she loves me — and yet won't even kiss me. Is n't that the meanest treatment you ever heard of?"

"I 'll do it now," Judith said promptly and very meekly, and, coming to her mother's side, she stooped and dropped a kiss lightly upon her lover's cheek.

Sorely against his will, Basil had to be content. "You don't object to her marrying a poor fellow?" he asked, looking anxiously up into Mrs. Jeffrey's face. "You would n't refuse your consent because I could only give her a plain, simple home?"

"My dear boy! the true happiness of my children is what I ask for, and riches do not always bring that," Mrs. Jeffrey answered, smiling kindly at the young man. "I know all about you, Basil" (she thought she did! Basil had the grace to feel ashamed of himself), "and we 're all fond of you. But what 'll I do without my girls? — first Francie — now Judy!"

"Oh, mother, you 'll have me a good while yet," cried Judith. "We 'll have to wait several years — as Jack and Frances will — won't we, Basil? and save up, as poor Jim was doing for Marnie — eh? We 'll have to wait, but we don't mind, do we, Basil?" Judy was kneeling beside the white iron bedstead now; she laid her warm, pink cheek against Basil's hand, and the rare tenderness

in her uplifted eyes filled the young man's heart with strong emotion.

"This is the happiest day in all my life," he declared, a sudden moisture suffusing his light eyes. "I 'm not half good enough for you, Judy; I never will be, I 'm afraid! But I 'll try to be a halfway decent sort of fellow; it 's all I 'd ever get to, and you must help me, sweetheart."

"Ay; we 'll help each other," Judy answered softly.

"Now we *must* go," said Mrs. Jeffrey. "I fear we 've stayed longer than we should." And as, spite of the patient's objections, the nurse agreed with Mrs. Jeffrey's decision, the mother and daughter bade Basil good-by.

"Come soon again; come to-morrow — every day, and stay a long time," he begged.

"I 'll come as often as I can," promised Judith; and the impatient young man had to content himself with that as best he might.

"Well, it does seem as if the greatest things were happening to us!" declared Rufie. When the news was told she had embraced Judy and wept upon her neck, and she now sat beside her twin on the shabby lounge in the dining-room, holding her hand and gazing at Judy with big wistful eyes. "Now there 'll have to be two weddings in the family. Oh," with energy, as an idea occurred to her, "would n't it be jolly to have them both on the same day — and married by uncle Gabe! Girls, would n't it be fine? Would n't it, mother?"

"Dear, dear, what an honor lies ahead of me!" remarked Mr. Kincaid, and taking off his glasses, he proceeded to polish them with a piece of chamois which he drew from his pocket.

Judith and Francie looked inquiringly at one another, smiled, blushed, and nodded.

"Don't talk about weddings; they 're not to be thought of for a long while," Mrs. Jeffrey said, a little sadly. "I am in no hurry to get rid of my daughters."

"But, mother, when people become engaged, one *must* take into consideration their getting married," asserted Ruth practically. "Judy, I 'll help you with your sewing," she volunteered; "and I 'll keep my eyes open for quaint pretty chairs and tables and things in the shops — bargains, you know. Miss Austin has some of the dearest little chairs at Lenox — perhaps we could find some like them. Then, if they 're not too expensive, Basil might buy them at odd times and store them away somewhere, against housekeeping, as Jim was doing for Marnie — Goodness me! what 've I said?" she cried, laying her hand involuntarily over her mouth as Judy gave her an emphatic nudge, and Margaret rose hastily and left the room.

"You might have shown more tact, if not consideration," Ursula told Rufie as she went past her, after Margaret.

"Tact! How should I know she 'd mind hearing that?" demanded the bewildered and indignant Ruth. "She *insisted* that she did n't care for Jim; how was I to know she 'd feel badly over

the furniture being mentioned? I think Margaret is *very* queer!"

The mother sighed. "Poor Jim!" exclaimed uncle Gabriel, stroking his chin, and, "Perhaps she cares more for Jim than she thinks," observed Judy sagely. "Don't continue the conversation when she comes in," she added to her ruffled twin as footsteps sounded in the hall.

Presently Ursula reëntered the room and Margaret with her; the latter's beautiful face wore a very subdued expression, and she chose a seat farthest from the light.

"Now that we are all together, I 'll tell of something nice that 's come to me this evening," Ursa said, taking a seat by the table, on which, as usual, sat Miss Weewee, and, apparently, alertly attentive to the conversation. Count Ito, not being allowed the privilege of sitting on the table, had to content himself with poking his little snub nose above its edge, and with friendly yaps inviting any one who would to a game of romps. "Jack brought the good news." Ursula nodded brightly to Frances, who smiled knowingly back. "Friends, fellow citizens, and dear ones, including Miss Weewee and the Count," she said, "my novel has been accepted! Grove and Erveng will publish it in the fall. Just think! in a couple of months more, my fondest dream 'll be realized, my book will be in print!"

"Did n't I say great things were happening?" Rufie asked, looking wise; and, "Oh, Ursa dear, I am so glad for you!" "You deserve it!" de-

clared Margaret and the rest of the family, while Frances ran and threw her arms around Ursula. "You dear faithful old darling!" she cried. "I *told* you this would come — did n't I? Now just wait till the book is read by the public! There 's a laurel wreath hovering around in the air, simply waiting to fall upon your head — I see it coming!" Carried away by the moment, Frances brandished a finger over Ursula's head, pointing off somewhere in the direction of the hall, whereupon Rufie leaned forward and peered so innocently in the same direction as to send the family into shouts of laughter.

Encouraged by the brilliant propheeies of her home circle, and especially by the positive proof of her publishers' letter, Ursula's hopes rose high, and her quiet clever face lighted up wonderfully.

"Grove and Erveng write so encouragingly!" she said. "This is all Jack's doings; dear fellow! he took it to his own publishers. A beginner as I am — I would n't have had the courage to approach such a firm. And they have accepted the story! I can hardly believe it. And, by and by, I 'll write other stories, better ones, perhaps, and, who knows? one of these days I may be able to give up the Leader, and devote all my time to writing my stories! Would n't that be fine? By that time all the girls will be married and gone from the nest, mother; then you and uncle Gabe and I 'll go off in the country somewhere and have a nice home together, eh?" At which there was a great outcry from all the girls. "Indeed, you

won't go off by yourselves, far from us!" "Oh, you bad girl, to wish to leave us here alone in the city!" "Why, Ursula, mother does n't belong to you alone!" and "I shall *never* marry!" they declared; the last two remarks coming from Rufie and Margaret — one in tones of indignation, the other of mournful resignation.

"This has been a red-letter day for me," Ursula told Francie the same evening in the privacy of their own room. "Besides the good fortune of my book being accepted, I got a long letter from Paul this afternoon. Such a cheerful, clever letter! — one of these days I 'll read you some bits from it. He has got the organist's position in Cleveland that he went out for, and writes that he 's enjoying his work immensely. Is n't that splendid to know? Besides, here 's Judy engaged to Basil, whom we all like — and you to dear, good, lovable Jack! Truly, Francie," — Ursa turned to the "youngest," with the brush held aloft in one hand, and her thick, dark hair falling in a cloud over her arm, — "truly, my dear, God is very, very good to us!"

Though Basil was, as the doctor had said, in no danger whatever, it was yet a good many weeks before he was able to stand upon his feet or use his sprained ankle. He was not removed from the comfortable apartment where his relatives had first found him; nor did the Jeffreys, to their knowledge, ever come across the "intimate friend" who had placed Basil there, though they did

meet Jim Ivors in Basil's room, and more than once.

Sometimes Judy made her visits to the hospital in company with uncle Gabriel, though usually under the chaperonage of her mother, and rather late in the afternoons. An unexpected change, however, in the arrangement of her "visiting" left the girl free one morning, and she and Margaret coaxed uncle Gabriel into leaving his dictionary and going with them to "cheer up" Basil.

The August day was charming, with a sky as blue and cloudless as ever June could show, and a gentle breeze that rustled the leaves and made the heat endurable. In their summer gowns of white the girls looked very dainty and attractive, and Mr. Kincaid had a sly laugh at the assiduous attentions of the young resident physicians in the hospital; the little gentleman enjoyed the guardianship of his pretty nieces.

"Well, this is a jolly surprise, to see you so early in the morning! You look as sweet 's a peach!" declared Basil warmly. He had been promoted to a rattan lounge over by the window; and his eyes dwelt with pride and admiration on the delicate high-bred face, soft dark eyes, and graceful figure of his little sweetheart.

Judy swept him a saucy courtesy. "I'm glad you appreciate my new gown," she said demurely. "But look at Marnie — is n't she a perfect picture in that big black hat?"

"She is n't a patch upon you," insisted Basil sturdily. "She does n't begin to know how to wear her clothes as you do!"

"Your partiality blinds your eyes, sir!" laughed Judy, but with a pretty pink coming into her cheeks. "Marnie is an out-and-out beauty."

So she was, and looking at her best this morning in her fresh white gown, and the big drooping hat, which she had trimmed herself, under which her hazel eyes sparkled brilliantly, and the color in her olive cheeks glowed like the heart of a rich red rose.

Margaret was a good deal of a mimic; and now for the entertainment of her relatives, she stood before them and showed the little party how the young doctors had manœuvred that morning to escort Judy and herself to the elevator, and, one of them, even to the patient's door.

"He is a little narrow-shouldered whitey-brown creature, about so high," Marnie said, holding her hand barely four feet from the floor, and then drawing herself up to the full height of her five feet seven of splendid womanhood. "Imagine him taking *me* in tow!" She laughed. "I could n't help thinking of the verse in your favorite college song, Basil — 'Says the flea to the elephant, who 're you shoving' " —

The three who were looking on and laughing at her antics saw Margaret's face suddenly change, the gay song died on her lips, the peach bloom faded out of her cheeks, and into her eyes came a wistful, deprecating expression.

Following the direction of her eyes, they saw Jim Ivors just turning to leave the room, where he had been, unobserved, for a few minutes.

Jim was not allowed to leave, for uncle Gabriel and Judy called eagerly, "Jim!" "Jim!" and going quickly to where he stood, caught him by the hands; while Basil settled back upon his pillows with a grim smile on his lips, and his watchful eyes fixed upon Margaret.

As Mr. Kincaid and Judy pulled Jim toward the lounge — he came reluctantly — Margaret rose and shyly, with a timid smile and swift pleading glance, held out her hand to him.

But coolly ignoring the friendly hand, Jim made a stiff bow, then hastily took a seat near Basil's lounge, turning his eyes rigidly away from Margaret.

And with a surprised, subdued expression on her face, a grieved droop of the lips, Marnie sat and looked at Jim. She recognized the gray suit he wore; he had got it new last summer, to please her — how delighted he had been when she said it was becoming to him! The suit was still becoming, but how shabby now; and how it hung upon his figure, for Jim had grown thin; and into the face that of old was so genial and kind had come a hard, reckless expression. For some reason that expression and the shabbiness of the gray clothes weighed upon Margaret's spirits, and the sight of Jim's limp, crooked necktie and frayed cuffs brought a most unaccountable lump into her throat.

Judy made several attempts to include Margaret in the conversation, in which Jim was doing his full share, talking a good deal, and fast. But

after one or two half-hearted efforts to respond, Marnie desisted, and leaving her chair went into the short quiet hall outside Basil's door, and stood at the window, looking down upon the tops of the houses with a very abstracted air. For all her abstraction, though, she recognized Jim's steps as he came out of the room, and was vaguely glad there were no nurses in the hall as she went forward and addressed her old friend.

"Jim," she said gently and very earnestly, "won't you speak to me?"

Jim turned, but without looking at her. "What is there to say?" he asked coldly.

"Say you forgive me — ah, Jim, you would if you knew all! Say you'll be friends with me again," she urged.

Then, for one moment, Jim let his eyes rest upon Margaret — upon the beautiful, vivid face, not one line or curve of which or item of daintiness had he forgotten in all the weary months since he had last seen it. "Friends!" he cried, his voice rough with the bitterness of his heart. "For friendship there must be confidence — trust; I have neither in you! We can never be friends — you understand? — *never!*"

Turning on his heel, he strode away, out of the hall. And covering her face with her hands, Marnie shrank back against the window, and wept scorching tears.

Though carefully planning to avoid one another, Margaret and Jim yet met again and again in

Basil's room. Jim's manner of pleasant intimacy with every one else who might be present, and of cold marked indifference toward Margaret never varied; and after that first attempt, Marnie made no farther effort to regain his friendship. Sometimes she would meekly return Jim's frigid bow, and sit in silence throughout the visit, with a wistful light in her eyes and a pathetic little droop at the corners of her mouth, listening to Jim's continuous and, apparently, light-hearted talk. At other times, however, Margaret would laugh and chatter, in the gayest of spirits, completely ignoring Jim's presence. On these occasions, he would assume silence, and, though rarely cutting short his visit, would stare at the wall or out of the window with a most bored expression on his ruddy handsome face. Still, although there appeared to be not the slightest enjoyment in these meetings, Margaret was always willing, even anxious, to join Judy and her mother or uncle Gabriel in their calls at the hospital.

During these days Margaret's cheeks lost their roundness, the rich bloom in them dwindled to a faint pink that came and went in a very uncertain fashion. The girl's eyes looked larger and more brilliant from the dark shadows that settled under them, and her spirits became so variable, often so depressed, that Mrs. Jeffrey grew anxious, and she and Ursula held a council.

"Perhaps I could get some of my royalty in advance, — that's done sometimes, I know, — and then we could send Marnie away in the country

for a few weeks," suggested Ursula. "If we can get her to go — dear Marnie!"

"No; I've a better plan," said Mrs. Jeffrey. "I'll write and ask your cousin Esther to let Margaret make her a visit. I'm sure Esther will be glad to have Marnie — and I've never asked her such a thing before — she will not refuse me, I know. The child must have a change, or she will get ill. I'll write to-day. But we won't say anything of the matter until we hear from Esther."

Before Mrs. Greenough's reply to that letter could be received, however, Margaret had, most unexpectedly, accepted another invitation to go out of the city.

The way it happened was this: On her way home from Mrs. Linton's (the old lady whose amanuensis and reader she had been for several months), Margaret was, one afternoon, caught in a sudden and violent storm. Finding that the parasol she carried was almost no protection against the driving rain, the girl gathered up her skirts, and, scurrying along the sidewalks, plunged into the first opening that offered shelter. It proved to be a narrow dark hallway, in which was a staircase leading to a tailor's shop above, and as Marnie whirled herself into its depths, damp and breathless, shutting her blue parasol with a click of relief, she bumped with some force against another occupant of the hall.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" she panted out; and raising her eyes, found herself face to face with Jim Ivors.

"Oh!" exclaimed Margaret, backing hastily away.

Jim bowed stiffly, and at once studiously bestowed his attention upon the rain, which, beating into the open hallway, soon drove Margaret and himself back as far as the stairs.

They two were the only ones in the narrow hall; and presently, obeying an impulse that was stronger than her pride, Margaret said softly, "Jim!"

There was a dead silence; Jim's face was held rigidly toward the doorway.

"Jim!" repeated Margaret pleadingly, "aren't you ever going to forgive me?" With her eyes fixed imploringly upon his averted face, she waited one — two — was it three? — seconds; they seemed an eternity to the proud girl. Then — even as Jim was about to turn and speak, though she did not know it — Marnie came suddenly to the end of her patience and penitence. "You may keep your forgiveness!" she cried out angrily, her fine figure drawn up, her hazel eyes flashing; "I don't want it now — I would n't have it! I never dreamed you could 've acted like this to me, Jim Ivors! Now we 're quits!"

Utterly regardless of her pet summer hat, her thin shirt waist, or that her parasol was left draining itself against the staircase, Margaret dashed past Jim, and out into the pelting rain.

And as soon as he could sufficiently master his astonishment to do so, after her went Jim, in hot pursuit, holding his big old cotton umbrella, with

one of its black attenuated ribs sticking out bare of cloth, well at arm's length before him, in the vain hope of reaching and covering Margaret's head. It might have been an amusing spectacle to any one at leisure to following the flying figures.

With her wet skirts flapping heavily at her heels, her waist plastered to her shoulders and arms, her hat a wreck, and innumerable small torrents cascading over its brim, Margaret tore along, conscious only of the tempest of anger, grief, and despair which filled her heart. And behind her floundered Jim, waving the umbrella at her and calling, in varying tones of command, persuasion, and entreaty, "Margaret! Margaret! Stop! do stop; d'you hear? Come under the umbrella! You 'll take cold! Margaret!"

On went Margaret unheedingly for several blocks — over running gutters, into puddles; Jim knew her feet must be soaking; then her speed began to flag, she was getting tired. Jim saw her put her hand to her side, and with one bound he was beside her. "*Peggie!*" he cried sharply, and catching hold of her arm, wheeled her briskly through two swinging doors and into the vestibule of a large publishing house which stands on the square. In the vestibule was a short flight of stone steps, and at the head of them an elevator, which, fortunately for our young people, was just then at the top of the tall building.

"Are n't you ashamed to tear out into the rain like that?" demanded Jim indignantly; but it was the intimate indignation of ownership — the

tone of old; the new, cold dignity which had so troubled Margaret was gone. "You 're simply soaking!" he said, touching her wet shoulders and arms. "Now you 're in for one of those bad bronchial coughs that pull you down so" —

"I don't care! I don't care if I get pneumonia and die!" cried out Margaret stormily, her voice choking, heavy tears across her eyes.

Then Jim put a finger under her chin and turned the beautiful flushed face up to his view; and looking down, down, into the brimming grieved eyes, all the pain and bitterness and anger of the dreary months left him. "Peggie," he said tenderly, "let 's put the past behind us and forget it — shall we?"

And right there in a corner of the vestibule, in imminent danger of the elevator and its accompanying genii appearing at any moment, Marnie laid her head against Jim's wet coat-sleeve and cried for joy.

The Margaret who, a little later, appeared before Mrs. Jeffrey and the girls was such a soaked, bedraggled, radiant young person that an explanation was instantly demanded.

"Come into mother's room, where we can be private, and I 'll tell you," answered Marnie, with a happy laugh, and headed the small procession which was immediately formed.

"Where 's uncle Gabe? he must hear the news, too," she said, when they had reached "mother's room."

"Oh, he had to go out to see his new protégé,

the Italian boy, Antonio something or other; he 's ill," explained Rufie. "You can tell him afterward."

"So I can," cheerfully agreed Margaret. "Well;" she looked at the expectant faces before her and laughed for sheer joy, then poured out her news. "Mother, girls — Jim and I 've made it up!" she informed them, blushing and dimpling in the prettiest manner. "And Jim starts for the Rocky Mountains on next Friday — a week from to-morrow; he has a splendid commission, to paint a picture of the Rockies in autumn — and — and — mother, I 'm going with him!"

Then arose a small babel of voices, everybody talking at once; and congratulations, questions, unasked-for advice, embraces, kisses, wails, and objections were jumbled together in the funniest fashion! It was some time before the excitement died down sufficiently for one voice to be heard distinctly. Then Margaret — she was on her mother's lap, her arms around that lady's neck, and such a sparkle in her eyes, such a brilliant color in her cheeks as had not been seen in them for many weeks — then Margaret said, very earnestly, "Yes, mother dear, it 's a dreadfully short time — one week — and I dare n't think of how I shall miss all you dear people! But, mother, I *could n't* let Jim go alone! I 've treated him so badly that I feel as if I could n't do enough to make it up to him! Oh, mother!" with a sudden burst of feeling; "it certainly was *beautiful* of Jim to forgive me, many another man would n't have done it! We 'll

just be married quietly, without any fuss at all; at the church, next Thursday, Jim thought, and start on our travels Friday. Oh, mother, I am so happy!"

"Then, after all, it was Jim that you loved," remarked Rufie, in her downright, uncompromising fashion. "After calling him all those names, too!"

"Yes, it was Jim I loved all the time, only I was so stupid I did n't know it," Margaret answered, a little shamefacedly, but brightly, too. "Mr. Austin's courtliness and wealth — position — turned my head for a while, but it was Jim I loved. I hated the thought of marrying Mr. Austin; I 'd go to the world's end with Jim! I said he was untidy — clumsy — all the rest" — she could n't bring her tongue to repeat the hard words now; "well, if he is, I don't care, I would n't have him different in one single particular."

"Would n't you like to have him a *little* less demonstrative?" asked Ursula, with an air of innocence that set everybody laughing.

"No, I *would n't* have him less demonstrative, not one atom less!" declared Marnie stoutly. "You can laugh, all of you, I 'm too happy to mind being teased. And, mother, I don't want a new dress or anything. No, Ursa, you dear thing!" as Ursula began a vehement protest. "I 've things enough, and plenty, to go roughing it in the Rockies. I 'll wear that pretty white gown of mine to be married in, and my blue serge will be just the thing for traveling!"

"In the mean time, my dear, do go and get off those damp clothes," urged Mrs. Jeffrey anxiously. "If you develop a bad cold, Jim will certainly have to go to the Rockies alone."

"Oh, but I've not taken cold, I know I have n't," protested Margaret, as the sisters carried her off and began divesting her of the draggled, damp clothing, and the summer hat, whose glory had forever departed.

Margaret was correct in her assertion that she had taken no cold from her soaking in the storm; and on her wedding day she was surely one of the most beautiful, radiant brides that ever passed over the portal of the old brown church. Only the family (in which were included Jack Rose and Basil Fabrey) and one or two old friends made the assemblage at the house, but there was a bride-cake and speeches and a good deal of quiet fun. At the last were some tears, too, when the hour of parting came, and Marnie went away with the husband of her choice, her eyes brimming with tears, but a happy smile on her lips. As for Jim, in a new suit of clothes, new necktie, even new cuffs, he looked handsomer than ever, though almost too well dressed to be himself, and he fairly radiated joy.

"I'm the happiest man in all the world, aunt Jeffa," he told Mrs. Jeffrey, "the very happiest! Don't be sad," he added, his kindly soul shining in his eyes; "in a couple of months or so we 'll be back again; then you and the girls 'll have to help us fix up our home — *our* home, Peggie's and

my home!" Jim set his lips together in a funny prim fashion that, with him, indicated a state of supreme content. "It 'll be your home, too, aunt Jeffa, if ever you need one. I 'm your son, now, — your son; you understand?"

It was an understood thing that the family gifts were to be practical, for the new home, and chosen upon the return of the bride. There came a few presents on the wedding day, however, among them a handsome box of silver from Miss Austin, with a few kind, characteristic lines to her old favorite (the little lady was of the very few to whom Margaret had written of her approaching marriage). Another wedding gift was from Basil, in a sealed envelope. It was addressed to "Mr. and Mrs. Jim Ivors," and below the superscription was scrawled, "Not to be opened until you are on board the train and steaming away." This of course excited some natural curiosity, and a joke or two at the expense of the donor, which, however, he laughed off.

But later in the afternoon, when Margaret and Jim had gone, and the guests, and when Basil and Judy were alone together for a while in the drawing-room, he brought up the subject. Basil's arm was well, but the scar across his cheek was of a new pink, and he still limped. He had come down from the hospital in a carriage, and under the care of an orderly, who had helped his charge up the Jeffreys' long flights of stairs, and was to return for him early in the evening. For his ankle's sake Basil had been on the lounge the greater part of

the afternoon; he was there now, and Judy sat beside him, in a low chair.

"You're the only one that 's asked me no questions about that sealed envelope," the young man said, smiling at his little fiancée. "Have you no curiosity to know what 's in it?"

"I think it's a joke," Judy replied promptly. "I know your weakness in that direction."

"No, 't was n't a joke; it was" — he spoke slowly, and his watchful eyes were on the girl's face — "it was my present to Marnie; a check."

"A check," repeated Judy, surprised; then she laughed. "Oh, yes, a make-believe check, for a thousand dollars? I knew 't was a joke. Better look out, they 'll keep it, and send it to us on *our* wedding day. Then the laugh will be on you, sir!"

"It was a genuine check, my check, for ten thousand dollars," Basil said deliberately.

Judy looked at him in bewilderment. "You mean that somebody sent it to you to give to Marnie?" she asked, opening her eyes very wide; adding immediately, "But we 've no friends rich enough to do that, except Miss Austin, and she has sent all that silver. Oh, you *must* be joking!" Still, she was evidently disturbed.

For many months — ever since his acquaintance with the Jeffreys had ripened into friendship, and especially since his engagement to Judy — Basil had been looking forward to a certain revelation which he intended to make to the family. In his mind he had often gone over what he would say

and do, and had always enjoyed the situation in prospective. But now that the time for the revelation had actually arrived, he was a good deal surprised to find himself nervous and wishing the "whole business," as he designated it, well over and off his mind. "You can never tell how she 'll take a thing," he thought, with an uneasy glance at Judy.

"I 'm not joking, honest! never was more serious in my life," he said quickly. "And it 's just as I told you. Margaret is my cousin, and Jim has been a true friend to me ever since I 've been in New York. I did n't know what to buy them as a wedding present, and they could use the money to a great deal better advantage for themselves than I could for them, so I sent them the check. I could easily do it, for, Judy," — Basil tried to get hold of her fingers, but the girl quietly and firmly clasped her hands and put them on her knee, out of his reach, — "Judy, I 've got plenty of money, I 'm not a poor man. I — I" — he stammered, then stopped entirely; he was finding it much less easy and agreeable to make his revelation than he had expected.

"Well?" remarked Judy coldly; her head was thrown back, and from under half-drooped lids she haughtily surveyed her lover.

"Now, Judy!" eagerly remonstrated Basil; then getting no further word from her, he took up his story, with a strong effort at his usual careless, offhand manner, to cover the horrible growing uneasiness that possessed him.

"There is n't very much more to tell; I 'm simply a rich man when you thought I was a poor man. That 's all! 'T was just a freak took me, to pass myself off as a poor fellow come to New York in search of a job." He hurried on. "And — and then — somehow — I kept it up until now. But I wanted many times to tell you, Judy — and it 's a relief, positively a relief to me now, to 've told you and got the matter off my mind."

"Why should you pretend to *us* that you were poor?" demanded Judith, with the same cold voice and glance.

Basil blushed until his ears burned — he found it very difficult to answer that question. "Well, I — I — wanted to be liked for myself," he blurted out sheepishly, and, as he would have expressed it in his own vernacular, "feeling like a fool!"

"Ah, I see; you thought your money would exercise an undue influence upon us," Judy said slowly, icily. "Then all that talk to me — and to mother — that day at the hospital," — she would n't look at Basil now, — "about your poverty, all that was just a play that you were acting, for your own entertainment — just untruth — every word of it! In fact, your whole life toward us has been false ever since the first time we met. Well," ignoring a passionate protest from Basil she pushed her chair away from the lounge and rose — Judy's face had grown deathly white, and the expression in her soft eyes brought to Basil's memory the dumb reproachful anguish he had once seen in the eyes of a wounded favorite dog of his,

but Judy's cold speech and haughty manner belied her eyes, — "well," she said, drawing her slight figure up to its fullest height, "perhaps you think your behavior a very pretty Lord of Burleigh bit of romance; I do not; I hate mysteries and underhand dealings — and untruths, no matter what their object might be. And I feel insulted — *insulted* — that you should have imagined I would ever marry for money. I would gladly have shared with you the poverty you romanced about. Now you are at liberty to find some other woman than me to share your wealth; I could never trust you again!" She turned proudly to leave the room.

But, perfectly reckless of the ankle, Basil hastily scrambled to his feet, and with a sort of hop, skip, and jump, got before Judy and stopped her progress. "You 're *not* going to leave me in this cruel, mean way," he cried out vehemently. "It required the consent of the two of us to make our engagement, and you 're not going to throw me over in this fashion before you even hear the whole story. I won't let you! Great Jupiter, Judith," gathering courage and determination as he spied the tears in Judy's eyes, "what 're you made of to be so hard upon a poor, miserable fellow that loves you? Were you poor as Job's moth-eaten bird or rich as Crœsus, d' you suppose that would make any difference in *my* love for *you?* And here you are willing to throw me over at a minute's notice! For what? Simply because I happen to have a few dollars more than you thought

I had. You 've just got to hear the whole story before you condemn me." He led her gently but firmly back, and seated her on the lounge he had just left.

"It is n't the money, Basil, it 's the deception. I feel as if I could never trust you again — you 've deceived me!" Judy said, her lips quivering, all her hauteur gone; and putting her head down on the lounge, turned away from Basil, she began to cry.

"I have deceived you, I have acted in a small, mean way, and I 'm awfully, *awfully* sorry for it!" cried Basil, in the deepest penitence. Despite sundry and sharp twinges in his "game leg," the young man had gone on one knee beside Judith, and he pleaded his cause with an earnestness and fervor that were hard to resist. "I don't see how I ever thought of such a scheme in regard to you all, for, believe me, Judy," and the honest ring in his voice carried conviction to her, "there are no people in the world whom I respect and honor more than I do your uncle and your mother and sisters. Why, I have the same sort of affection for cousin Etta as I have for my own mother! 'T was n't because I considered any of you mercenary that I planned this, for I soon found out to the direct contrary. Nor was it for the sake of a mystery or a practical joke. It 's just this, and this is *absolutely* the truth" — Judy held her breath to hear, but still with her face averted.

"For a fellow of my age, I 've seen a good deal of the world," went on Basil, "and the world —

the biggest part of it, anyway — bows down to money. Seven years ago — I was seventeen then — my father had a severe stroke of paralysis, and though he lived for several years after that, he was a confirmed invalid, never equal to the smallest detail of business. He had big interests at stake, and somebody had to take hold or we 'd have lost everything. So I gave up college — I had just entered — and buckled down to work. Times were favorable — all the governor's — my father's — schemes matured well, and his death left me with a pile of money. And then began the trouble!" Basil's thin lips curved contemptuously, his jaw set, and his eyebrows became one straight line in a heavy frown. He was n't pretty to look at, but turning her head on the sofa cushion Judy regarded him with moist, mournful, inquiring eyes. "Because I had a fortune, I became a most wonderful person; the way men bowed down to me, and women and girls ran after me, made me fairly sick! Now, you know, Judy, I 'm no fool," remarked Basil parenthetically; "I know I 'm about as keen a business man, for my age, as could be scared up anywhere in this free land, and just as well I know that I 'm ugly, unmannerly, and ignorant. (The very first time I saw you, you intimated pretty plainly that I had no manners, and you hit the nail on the head!) And when everybody began praising me up to the skies for my money, and kept it up, *ad nauseam*, I knew just about how much, or rather how little, it was worth! Well, that sort of thing is n't good for a

fellow! I got to be morose, and suspicious of everybody; the milk of human kindness that 's in me began to curdle to a high state of acidity. All that flattery and deceit wore upon me, body and soul; that 's what it did. Last fall I got desperate, dropped the whole thing, — business, society, all, — and went to the Rockies for some hunting. From there I came on here on a matter of business. I wanted to take something home for mother; a newspaper man I happened to know advised a picture; he is a friend of Jim's, and took me to Jim's studio. I liked 'Off the Coast of Maine,' and bought it on the spot" —

"You the man that bought Jim's picture? Then it 's for you that he 's gone to paint that picture of the Rockies," cried Judy, with an impulsive movement of the hand.

Basil's smile flashed out. He caught the little hand, quickly kissed it, then wisely laid it down; and Judy as quickly hid the small member in the folds of her dress. "Go on," she said.

"I did n't know Jim from Adam then," went on Basil obediently, "but mother was born in Maine, not very far from that bit of coast he 'd painted, and I mentioned that. That led him to speak of your mother, who 's from the same place. Of course, I 'd heard my mother talk of cousin Etta (mother knows all about this scheme of mine, and now you shall see the letter I 've got from her about you!), and when he offered to bring me here to call I came; though first I made Jim promise that he would n't mention I was the person that

had bought his picture. D' you remember that first evening, and the two settings down you gave me?" He laughed, and all the merrier when Judy said calmly, "Well, you deserved them!"

"I know I did," cheerfully acquiesced the young man. "But your mother is really responsible for all this scheme — my deception." A twinkle came into his eyes. "That first evening, when I started to tell her of the poor old governor's illness, she misunderstood, broke in, and said she knew all about it, that she 'd heard of father's investing in California and losing all the money he had. That gave me the idea. Judy," Basil became emphatic, "from that very first evening I 've thought you the daintiest girl I ever laid eyes on! I think I loved you from the very minute we met, in spite of your snubs! I made up my mind that you should be my wife, if I could get you! I knew you were true and honest, — I *felt* it, — but for my own suspicious self's sake, to satisfy myself, and for my heart's comfort and content, I bound Jim over to secrecy. I made business to keep me in New York, and went in to win your love as poor, uncouth, ill-tempered Basil Fabrey, without a dollar to his name. And I *have* won you, sweetheart, eh?" By some intuition his hand found that other hand hid in the folds of Judy's gown; and the amount of persuasive pleading that he managed to express in his light eyes was really astonishing.

Judy sat up very straight, and looking very serious. "You 've been with us almost daily for nearly a year, we 've been engaged six whole weeks,

and you 've kept all this from me," she said wistfully, yet firmly. "I could n't stand your having mysteries from me, Basil — keeping from me things so important and intimate as these. I could n't! I 'd rather give you up now, for I 'd lose confidence in you, and faith, and without those, love can't last."

Then with her hand tight clasped in his own two, and with his inmost soul shining in his eyes, Basil Fabrey honestly made answer: "Judy, every human being has some weakness of character; I have mine. Even to you, I can't promise to turn my heart inside out every day; I can't promise to tell you all I know. But I trust you as I 've never trusted any living creature before, and I love you, dear, with all my strength! Your little hand holds my heart's strings, and if, when we 're married, you don't always know all my secrets, it 'll be your fault, not mine! How is it, sweetheart — will you give your life into my keeping?"

Judy's answer is not recorded, but judging from the rapturous exclamation with which her whispered word was received, and by subsequent events, it must have been the one that Basil was longing to hear.

There was a short contented silence, then Judy remarked, a little wistfully, "So there 'll be no saving up and choosing our furniture, piece by piece — no cosy little flat for just ourselves. It 'll take me a good while to get accustomed to the new order of things. My mind is all unsettled!"

"We need n't have the little flat, but we shall

have money to spend on those who are poor and needy," Basil said, and laughed aloud at the light that sprang into Judy's eyes, and her delighted "Oh!" "I've just promised there should be no secrets between us," he added, "so I'll tell you what I've been doing; I'm putting three of the boys in the wood-carving class through the Trade Schools. They're bright youngsters, I'm glad to give 'em a helping hand. I gave something toward your scheme, too; I bought four houses on Deadlock Street, to make space for the playground" —

"Oh, Basil! Basil!" cried Judy, clapping her hands softly; a joyous, happy, proud Judy it was, too! "You *are* the most generous, kind, thoughtful — dear — fellow!"

Her praise was sweet to Basil, but after the manner of men he laughed it off. "It's your doing, not mine," he said. "Until I met you, I'd never given a thought to there being poor people in the world whom I might help, — God's poor, as you call them. But I know now, and we won't forget them, you and I, will we?" he added.

"There's mother in the next room! Mother! mother!" called Judy. "Come in here and let Basil tell you the Arabian Nights story he's just been telling me. Come, mother!"

CHAPTER XVI

GREAT DAYS

One fine Saturday afternoon in November, the playground at Dedlock and Hinckson streets, thenceforward to be known as the Children's Park, was formally opened and handed over to the city authorities. It was also taken possession of that day by the children and young people for whose enjoyment and benefit it was designed. Besides the children, in many instances, came their parents, cousins, aunts, and other relatives. Feeling the occasion especially their own, the Dedlockites and Hincksonites turned out in full force, and the residents of the adjacent streets with them, to say nothing of large deputations which arrived from up town and down town and considerably swelled the throng. Such a jolly, orderly crowd as it was, too, the typical American crowd, good-humored, patient, and alert; appreciating all that offered, and most anxious not to miss anything, as it stood, and walked, and sat on the playground.

A band discoursed sweet sounds in a music stand above which floated the stars and stripes. Flags also waved from a tall flagstaff in the middle of the park, and from the windows of the one house which had been left standing on the grounds.

This house had been put in perfect order, and here were baths, a swimming-tank, a gymnasium, a wide hall with accommodations for meetings, dancing, or amateur theatricals, and a comfortable reading-room supplied with a fair library, magazines, papers, etc. Adjoining the house was a large covered space for games and romps on rainy days. On the grounds a fountain played merrily in honor of the occasion, benches were set in convenient places, and great heaps of earth and shining white sand stood about; there were innumerable swings, see-saws, merry-go-rounds, the latter on tall posts with lengths of strong rope hanging from them in the most inviting fashion; and straight smooth poles, for those who might feel inclined to "shin up," shorter poles holding open bean-baskets, and a simple outdoor gymnasium for girls as well as boys; and besides these, and above all, there were wide open spaces in plenty where ropes might be skipped and races run, where quoits, basket-ball, tennis, and football might be played, or kites flown, marbles rolled, or any other game that was "in" enjoyed.

A few trees, which had been found in the yards of the tenements taken down to make the space, still stood on the playground, mostly bare of leaves just now, but holding promise for the spring, when other trees would be set out, and flowers around the fountain.

After the opening exercises were over, and the first shy awe of ownership had worn off, grown people and children began to amuse themselves, the elders

surging in a continuous stream through the house and over the grounds, full of kindly curiosity and interest; while the young people proceeded to enjoy the games and liberty offered by the playground. The Indian-summer sky was blue and cloudless, and despite the soft haze in the atmosphere and the breeze that was abroad, the day was warm, and the refreshments provided by one of the committee (Basil), in the shape of lemonade and cakes, were highly appreciated by the crowd.

The mayor and several other city magnates and prominent men were present, and numerous addresses were made, but none was received with such evidence of approval as were the few words spoken by Judith.

With the exception of Margaret, who was still with Jim in the Rockies, all the Jeffreys were present at the opening of the playground, as were Basil, and Jack Rose, Carter Ferris and Ad Lambert (the last two in the interests of the Leader), little Miss Austin, merry and vivacious as ever, and Roger Austin, who had recently returned from Europe, rather earlier than he had intended. Among the crowd were some other old acquaintances of ours: the Laidlers, Tilley ahead, gaping in delighted wonder, while "Villie" — to be protected from the crowd — walked, solemn-eyed and critical, between his mother and Louise; and Netta, with a new, wee baby in her arms, and several small brothers and sisters hanging on to her skirts. Mrs. Quayle was there, too, with her lazy husband, and her brood of various sized active, quicksilver

Quayles; Johnnie — such a tall, thin, white Johnnie! — limping painfully along with his leg in an iron brace; and Joe Foyle just out of the reformatory, more hardened and reckless than when he was put in; and Freddie Metz, happy-go-lucky and impudent, at the head of his "gang." It was this young gentleman and his satellites and Joe Foyle who started the cry of "A speech from Miss Judit'!" "A speech from Miss Judit' Jeffrey!" "A speech! a speech!" and kept it up until the enthusiasm became contagious, and such a shout went up that Judy had to respond to it and come to the front of the stand. A great many of those present knew her, and she looked so high-bred and dainty standing there, so young and pretty, that a roar of admiration arose from the crowd.

As Judy looked over the immense bright area of the playground, then down upon the throng of upturned faces before her, and realized that at last her darling project for these "neighbors" of hers was an accomplished fact, her heart swelled with thankfulness and a lump sprang into her throat.

It was a minute or two before she could speak; then, "Dear people," she said, with an impulsive, friendly movement of her hands toward them, her voice full of feeling, "dear friends, I can't make a speech. I can only tell you how very, very happy and glad I am that you all have now this splendid place in which to rest and play and enjoy a good time. In this crowd I see ever so many of my boys and girls," — again she made that friendly little wave of her hands, which brought nods and broad

gratified smiles from a number of the throng, — "and they know the talks we 've had together, they and I, about what such a playground as this would mean to us. We hoped for it, though not expecting that our hopes would ever be realized. But they *have* been realized; God put it into the heart of some rich, kind men to make you this splendid gift; and now that this large well-equipped playground, with all its comforts and enjoyments, is actually yours, I 'm sure you will all show to your friends and relatives, to the good men who have given you this place, and to the whole city, the excellent use you will put it to. I 've told the people who have given you this park that the pleasure, the fun and exercise, that you 'll all get here will keep you off the streets and out of mischief, and help you to be better boys and girls, and by and by, better men and women, better citizens; in fact, help you to do better all through your life. I have n't promised too much for you, have I?"

Under cover of the lusty cries of "No! no! you have n't! you have n't!" of the shouts of applause, wild cheers, and clapping of hands which ensued, Judy made her escape from the stand, and, joined by other members of the family, mingled with the crowd.

So came into existence the Children's Park, situated at Dedlock and Hinckson streets, and which to-day is proving itself a safety-valve for high spirits and youthful vigor, and an incalculable blessing to the boys and girls of the East Side.

Besides the completion and opening of the playground, there are some other pleasant events to record of the Jeffreys and their friends.

On hearing what Judy called Basil's "Arabian Nights" story, Mrs. Jeffrey's first involuntary exclamation was, "Then Judy will have to live in California — far from us all!" and in a tone of such dire dismay that Basil's feelings were rather injured. Indeed, in the days which followed, more than once the rich young man felt as if his long considered and, in his estimation, important revelation had somehow missed its point. The family with one accord had taken the intelligence calmly. Mrs. Jeffrey's manner was precisely the same to him as of old, uncle Gabriel still administered a gentle, much-needed snub now and then, and the girls, Judy included, continued to tease, laugh at, and joke with their cousin, as the mood took them. And while sincere in his professions of disgust with the fulsome flattery and adulation paid him for his money by the world, Basil was yet at times a little nettled at the Jeffreys' perfect indifference to his worldly worth. Naturally generous, now that his secret was out, the young man was inclined to play the grand seigneur, and to load down his relatives and betrothed with gifts of every description. This, however, with her good sense and quiet tact, Mrs. Jeffrey soon put a stop to.

"But I 'm your cousin, I 'll soon be your son, why should n't I send you and the girls whatever I please? What 's the harm?" demanded Basil irritably, on this occasion.

"No harm, my dear boy; indeed, it 's very kind of you," replied Mrs. Jeffrey, in her pleasant yet firm manner. "And knowing that we thoroughly appreciate your kind motives and your affection for us, I 'm sure you will not go contrary to my wishes when I ask you not to make us any more such expensive presents."

As she remained firm to this resolve, though Basil fumed a little, he had e'en to submit, and content himself with showering gifts upon Judy until that fastidious young lady felt compelled to tell him, "As I have but two fingers on each hand on which I could possibly care to wear rings, and," with a demure smile, "as I 'm not a Chinese image on which to hang jewels, I 'm beginning to wonder what 's to become of all the pretty ornaments you 've brought me;" which called out another little storm from Basil.

Unwarned by these experiences, young Fabrey shortly after ran into another, when he urged (as he soon began to do) that Judy's and his wedding should be at an early date, and, as he expressed it, in "bang-up style!"

"I know scores of people here and in California that I mean to ask to our wedding," he told his fiancée one day, "and they could n't possibly squeeze into these small rooms if they even tried. Now my idea 's this: I 'll hire a big, handsomely furnished house right away, in some good location, for a month, you people will move in, and we 'll be married from there — have reception and everything, eh? You have your sisters and some other

girls for bridesmaids, and I 'll scare up an equal number of men for ushers ; we 'll have a breakfast from Sherry's, and a jolly good time all round, and the whole business shan't cost cousin Etta one cent. Now I know exactly what you 're going to say," he cried out, putting up his hand as he saw Judy's face change and she opened her mouth to speak, — " I can guess every word of it, and I beg you not to say it ! I don't see why you and the family should treat me in this formal way. I 'm your cousin as well as going to be your husband, and I don't see why I should n't be allowed to bear the expense, particularly when I 've got more money than I know what to do with, and would be only too delighted to spend some on you people. Ah, Judy," — dropping suddenly into pleading, — " don't be so stiff and proud ! Do let me have my way for once ! "

The color flamed in Judy's face ; Basil knew well the poise her little head assumed ; but love for the blundering, kind-hearted fellow made her voice very gentle. " Basil dear, this is very generous of you," she said ; " but we could n't let you do it ; mother would never consent to such an arrangement, and I would n't have her consent to it for the world ! You can't have a grand wedding, sir," she added playfully, " because you are marrying a poor girl." She laughed gayly over it. " By and by, though, when we 're in your — our — own house — there might be festivities, should you feel so inclined. Let us wait a few months longer," she coaxed ; " mother would like us to

wait, she said so to me yesterday. And as she wants us to do this, I think we should. Don't you think it would be nice for us to wait until Jack and Francie are ready, and the four of us be married on the same day? I 'd like that. I don't think that would be very far away, now that Jack's book is doing so well. To please mother, Basil, don't you think we might wait awhile?"

Basil arose in a great huff. "Wait!" he cried —"for that slow poke Rose to make enough money to get married? Wait a dozen years or two — that 's what it 'll be with Frances and him, and we 're to hang on to suit them! Why should we? Cousin Etta should n't expect it. The whole truth of it is, you think more of your mother and the girls than you do of me. That 's what this means! And I won't stand that, I must be *first* with you, *always!*"

Judy was provoked; she threw up her head proudly. "There is no first or second in my love for you and my mother and sisters," she said coldly. "Each has a distinct, separate place in my affections, and one love does not in the least conflict with the other. Had n't I been very sure of the quality of my love for you, I would never have promised to marry you. At the same time, I cannot and shall not ever love my family the less because of my caring for you. Mother does n't insist, she asks us to wait awhile, and I think we sh—"

Basil's jealous temper was roused; he had never met with much opposition in his life, and did n't

take kindly to thwarting. "You *don't* love me as well as you do them," he interrupted vehemently, "or you 'd be willing to marry me and go to the end of the world with me, at a moment's notice. Look at Marnie, did n't she marry Jim at a week's notice and go camping out in the mountains with him? Why can't you do as I want? No! you don't care a fig for me, that 's the reason!" Jamming on his hat with angry energy, the young man strode out of the room without waiting to hear Judy's answer.

"I 'll stay away a week — two weeks — and just let her miss me!" fumed Basil, tramping furiously along the streets. "Another girl would 've jumped at such a wedding, and been thankful. But, no! Miss Judy is too proud! she 's always got to be different from everybody else. I 'll just let her alone for a week or two — she 's an airish little piece!" So he fretted and stormed, though in the depths of his heart knowing that he would n't have Judith different in even one particular, that, in fact, it was just that reserve and loyalty, that wholesome pride and dainty elusiveness, which he now designated as "airs," that made Judy's charm for him. "I 'll stay away two weeks!" he told himself repeatedly that afternoon; and managed to keep away from the Jeffreys' until the next evening. By then his anger had evaporated, his longing for a sight of Judy grown stronger than his sense of injury, and with an attempt at his usual manner, though in reality rather sheepishly, he walked into the dining-room where Judith sat alone, and told

her, "Well; here I am again! I could n't stay away, you see. Have your way about the wedding."

The warm light that sprang into Judy's eyes, the loving, impulsive fashion in which her little hands clasped his own, were precious beyond value to Basil. "Am I not worth waiting a few months for?" she asked wistfully.

"I 'd wait seven — fourteen — years for you, if need be, as Jacob did for what 's-her-name in the Bible!" cried Basil fervently. The scowl, which for the last day and a half had held possession of his forehead, now vanished, and his smile flashed out bright and sunny, making a very different looking person of the young man.

"You 'll not have to wait as long as Jacob did for Rachel, that I promise you," Judy archly informed him, with one of her rare caresses.

"I can't wait in New York," Basil said. "I 've finished the business that 's kept me here all this time; so I 'll take a run out home, see mother, look into business affairs out there, and begin hunting up a house for us to live in by and by. Mother 's got into the way of staying at a hotel, to avoid the bother of housekeeping — she is n't strong; but you would n't like that life. I thought not," as Judy made a hasty movement of dissent; "and I 've got to have something absorbing to occupy my mind, or I 'd be stewing about you, fidgeting, and perhaps get to thinking you did n't care for me; I 'm a suspicious sort of a brute, as I suppose you know by now."

Judy's fingers tightened round his hand. "You shan't wait long, dear fellow, you shan't!" she whispered.

So Basil went back to California, and Judy laid in a large stock of stationery and devoted a portion of each day to writing him what Ruth jealously declared were "regular journals." Basil's letters, as a rule, were short, he did not shine as a correspondent, but what they lacked in length he made up for in telegrams, Judy receiving one every day in the week, and, sometimes, three a day.

In the mean time Jack Rose had been writing a book, his first novel, having hitherto contented himself with putting out short stories, and almost immediately after publication The Faithful Failure of Robert Herrick sprang into a wide popularity. There are books and books which win favor with the public; this one of Jack's was a simple story, told in simple Saxon English, but the characters in it were so true to life, the message it carried so genuine and needed, and so uplifting, that the critics spoke only the truth when they described the book as a "veritable human document." Grove and Erveng's printing-presses worked night and day to supply the demand; Robert Herrick leaped into the "hundred thousand" copies, and John Minot Rose became a person of great interest to the public. Paragraphs about him began to appear in the newspapers and magazines; and dazzling offers for his next book poured in upon him. All this popularity consid-

erably disturbed Jack, and particularly the dazzling offers.

"Of course, I 'm very glad the book 's going so well," he told Frances one evening, when he had come in late from the Leader office, tired, and looking careworn; "but I wish those personal items would stop appearing — they worry a man! And these letters from publishers" — he held out several — "they 're making me the wildest, most liberal offers, for books that I could n't possibly write! You know, little woman,"—this was Jack's pet name for his tall young fiancée, — "I 'm not one of the brilliant kind that can reel off a book at short notice. I have to have a story in my mind a long time, and grow to know the characters in it, and be so interested in them that they come to be living, breathing people to me and I absolutely *must* write about them. I must be full to the brim of the story — possessed by it — before I can tell one word of it — I can't write to order. At present, I have n't one idea in my head, not a ghost of one, for another book, and none may come for a year — years — I can't tell, and here these offers keep coming! I wish they 'd stop all this talk and notice of me; it just bothers and upsets me!"

There was such a worried expression in Jack's honest gray eyes that Francie took his long-fingered hand in hers, and began gently stroking it.

"Don't let your praise trouble you, dear heart," she said tenderly. "Remember what old à Kempis says, — the verse you once quoted for me, that afternoon in the park, — 'You are none the better

because you are praised, you are none the worse because you are blamed; what thou art, thou art!'"

Jack's face brightened. "That 's so! that 's a fact!" he declared. "There 's comfort in those words; I 'll try and hold on to them. Now help me decide another question. Hilliard Erveng came to see me to-day. On behalf of Grove and Erveng he advises me to give up the Leader at once and devote all my time to writing books. Hill thinks I ought to do it. Now," Jack looked appealingly at Frances, "there 's more money in the stories — but," slowly, reflectively, "I think I 'd rather not give up the Leader for a while yet; I can't say now for how long. As I 've told you, I could n't sit down and begin another story right away, and I know that I *can* do some good by staying on in the office and helping two fellows there." Jack colored up at his own modest self-praise, but soon forgot himself in his earnestness. "When I first went on the staff, Driscal used to object to my editorials, — to the prineiples I expressed in them. He said I was old-fashioned in my ideas, and that the Leader was n't a Sunday-school organ to point a moral to the public. Well, perhaps I am old-fashioned in some ways," Jack said simply; "but you know, Francie, right is right and wrong is wrong, there can be no 'fashion' about principles; and I got so discouraged that several times I thought of resigning my position. But somehow, I did n't; I hung on, and kept writing just what it seemed to me was fair and honest to write.

And gradually, when Driscal found that the circulation of the paper was n't falling off, but gaining, and that nobody kicked at the sentiments expressed in my editorials, why, he let me alone, and now rarely questions anything I write.

"Now," Jack leaned forward and waved an impressive forefinger in the air, "most men on a newspaper write just what they 're told to write; it 's expected of them, and very often strenuous circumstances compel them to meet those expectations, but I 've got two young fellows in training that are not like that. It 's for their sakes that I want to stay on the Leader. One of them, Oliphant, has been in the office a couple of months, the other 's just come, and they 're going to make their mark in journalistic work, or I 'm much mistaken. They 're 'strong' men, with sound views, and they 're getting the courage of their convictions. In a newspaper office a man needs courage as well as intellectual ability — courage of the highest kind; and by using my influence in the office, — I 'm a much bigger personage with Driscal since Robert 's grown so popular," Jack opened his eyes at Francie, — "by using my influence for those two fellows and seeing them 'through' with Driscal now, they 'll have cultivated a stiff backbone of their own and be able to depend on it before I step out. If I left now, I 'm afraid Driscal might overrule them — he 's a cantankerous animal! and that 'd be a loss to the paper. Of course," Jack added, trying to be dispassionate, "I 'm not the editor-in-chief of the Leader, and Driscal might

say this was officious; but an honest, fearless newspaper is a power in the land, and I feel as if I ought to stay on and give those fellows a helping hand. What do you think about it?" Jack finished with anxious eyes, and with locks that, in his preoccupation, he had ruffled rampantly.

"You 're perfectly right! Stay on, by all means, until you 've done your duty by those men," replied Francie promptly. "'T won't hurt us to wait a little longer."

"Oh, but we need n't wait at all," eagerly cried Jack. "Hilliard tells me that Robert is bringing me in a nice little penny, so we can get married just as soon as you 're ready; and," he added wistfully, "make it early, little woman!"

As one result of this conversation there was a family council held that evening, with the subsequent event of a double wedding in the Jeffrey family on January fifth — just five weeks later.

The fifth proved itself a glorious winter day, clear and cold, with a bright sun casting a glitter over the snow which lay upon the ground and powdered the leafless trees in the park. There was no reception, but after all, the weddings were not so quiet, for all the relatives and friends, including Basil's "scores," were invited to the church, and a goodly company assembled to witness the ceremony. Some of Judy's "poor people" and boys and girls were also remembered, seats being found for them in the gallery from whence was obtained an excellent view of all the doings. Then, by order of one of the bridegrooms, the interior of the

old brown church was elaborately and beautifully dressed with plants and flowers; and a full vested choir formed two lines and sang "The Voice that breathed o'er Eden," as the bridal party passed up the aisle to the chancel, where uncle Gabriel and the rector awaited them. The bridegrooms were waiting there, too — Basil pale, nervous, scowling, until he met Judy's calm, loving gaze; and Jack Rose so filled with happiness as to have entirely forgotten his usual shyness. With all the ease and dignity of one now four months a married man, Jim gave away the brides, who, like all brides, looked charming in their white array; the new husbands held themselves proudly, as befitted their good fortune; and that afternoon's Leader came out with a full-column glowing description of the auspicious event, which was read with particular interest by the admirers of the author of Robert Herrick.

Whether the happy couples took their wedding trip together, or where they went, I am not at liberty to tell, but when, two or three weeks later, they appeared at a reception given for them by Mrs. Felix Rose, all four looked as happy as Anglo-Saxon etiquette ever permits newly married people to appear in public.

The reception was from four to seven o'clock, and when the last of the invited guests had bowed himself out, the various members of the Rose and Jeffrey family then proceeded to enjoy what Basil Fabrey afterward declared was "a jolly good time!" They were a host in themselves. Old

Mr. Rose, stooping more and more about the shoulders, and more and more absorbed in his ancients, quite warmed to merry, talkative uncle Gabriel. He took the reverend gentleman into his study and showed him the Fetich in two or three revised editions, and his latest work on some other ancient, long-forgotten race of people. Philip Rose, the elder brother, had come on from Chicago to be present at the wedding of Jack, whom now and then he still called by the old-time boyish name of "Rosebud." Phil had brought with him his wife (a quiet, mouse-like little woman, whose maiden name was Helen Vassah) and his four children — the twins, Felix and Nora, and their younger brothers, Philip and Hugh.

At one time during the evening Mrs. Derwent touched her husband's arm, with a whispered, "Look, Max!" and a significant glance toward the hall where were Phil and Felix. The brothers were walking slowly back and forth, talking in low tones, with bent heads, and with Phil's arm thrown across the younger one's shoulder, in the old-time attitude. It was a stronger Felix now, and more robust, though still lame and often compelled to carry a cane, and with the same calm gaze and sunny kindly smile. Although now prominent in his profession, with many wealthy and important clients, Felix Rose was also widely known as the "poor man's" lawyer. His wife Alice was in the drawing-room (her little son Felix leaning against her knee) talking with the new bride, Mrs. Basil Fabrey, and with Ruth and the elegant Mrs. Chad-

wick Whitcombe, whose dandified looking husband was discussing "mines" and "silver" with Basil. Betty and Hilliard Erveng made a merry group with Francie and Jack, Mrs. Jeffrey, and Max and Nannie Derwent; while Alan and his yellow haired, sweet-faced sister Mädel and Ursula Jeffrey sat in a corner and talked of the absent Paul, and of another Rose who was absent — one Katharine, or Kathie, who had married an Englishman and gone to live in England.

Besides all the talking and laughter there was a good deal of dancing done that evening, by the grown people as well as by the eleven children who called "Professor" Rose grandfather, and the amount of vigor and enjoyment, to say nothing of grace, that was put into those gyrations is beyond description.

As Basil was a man of wealth, and Jack Rose a public favorite through Robert Herrick, many social attentions were offered to our young married people, some of which they accepted, while others, for lack of time (or, perhaps, inclination), they were forced to decline.

Of one of the entertainments which they accepted I must tell you. It was a dinner given by Mr. and Mrs. Jim Ivors, and great were the preparations for it. Mrs. Jeffrey and Rufie were on hand all day to help, and the brides — Judy from the Waldorf and Francie from the Rose home, where Jack and she were living until their own home-nest was ready — went down to the studio building where Jim and Marnie had their rooms,

and lent their aid, that all might go off well. The Ivors's apartment was at the top of the tall building (fortunately there was an elevator), and very cosy and comfortable it was — "artistic" was the term Mrs. Marnie liked best to have applied to her home. But there was no denying it that with the exception of Jim's studio (where his new picture, "Autumn in the Rockies," was in due state of progress) the rooms were small, and for this reason it required some planning and ingenuity to seat twelve people in the wee dining-room. It is a well-known fact, however, — to housekeepers, — that rooms and dining-tables can be made to "stretch," and it was certainly demonstrated on this particular occasion. Besides the new brides and bridegrooms, and the host and hostess, the guests were Mrs. Jeffrey, uncle Gabriel, Ursula and Ruth, Alan Rose, Carter Ferris, and Ad Lambert, the last two being, one a struggling artist, the other an impecunious, witty journalist, and both old friends of Jim and the Jeffreys.

It was a tight squeeze around that festive board, but if elbows touched, and if, at certain angles, one or two of the company ate their dinner with the unusual complement of three legs under the table to take care of instead of two, who cared? No one there, I am sure.

Such a pretty table as it looked — one of Mrs. Jack's most artistic efforts! with the fine damask napery and shining glass (the family wedding presents to Marnie) and Miss Austin's handsome silver, and Mrs. Basil's contribution of exquisite

pink roses to set it all off, and with such a beautiful young matron at one end, such a handsome ruddy Benedict at the other.

Though nominally Marnie was in charge of her own dinner party, it was capable Rufie who received the fluttering nervous orders telegraphed by the young hostess's eyes, and calmly, as one to the manner born, interpreted them to the trim little maid who made her way with such expedition and deftness around the crowded room. It was Ruth, too, who had arranged the menu, and, with Mrs. Jeffrey's and Gretchen's help, carried it out so successfully. And if, now and then, Gretchen's inquisitive eyes peeped around the screen that stood before the kitchen door, can any one blame her for taking a look at the festivities which in her way she had helped to promote? Only Rufie saw her.

Such a jolly little dinner as it was! everybody (even the hostess, when once she was assured the domestic machinery was moving smoothly) enjoyed himself and herself. Such witty remarks were made, such laughter-provoking stories told, such toasts drunk, such amusing speeches given, that the hours slipped by like a velvet-footed thief, and almost before one knew it the dinner was over, the evening past, and it was time to bid good-by.

"Well," remarked Basil to his wife, as with a white shining cloak thrown over that lady's wedding gown, and with her long train over her arm, they two were walking the few blocks to their hotel, — "well, of all the social functions, large or

small, that I've attended, — and I've had some experience in that line, — I've enjoyed Jim's and Marnie's dinner the most. It was a grand success, from beginning to end!"

And, expressed or unexpressed, that was the opinion of all who were at the dinner.

CHAPTER XVII

UNCLE GABE'S PARISH

"HAS the Muse deserted you? Is this one of the times when the story refuses to be written?" Mrs. Jeffrey asked, one afternoon, coming into the dining-room where sat Ursula at the wide-topped desk by the west window. Miss Weewee was also in the room, extended on the table in an attitude of supreme comfort, with her hind legs drawn up, and a slender black and white paw thrown gracefully across her upturned face. Under cover of this paw she opened one green eye and glanced at Mrs. Jeffrey, then fell off to sleep again.

A spring and summer and winter had passed since Marnie and Jim gave their gay little dinner party, and now another spring was lending beauty to the world. Ursula had been improving an unexpected half holiday from the Leader, and the sheets of manuscript lying beside her testified to her diligence. But now she was sitting idle, with her elbows on the desk, her cheek resting against her clasped hands, and in her eyes a tender yet absent expression, which gave evidence that her thoughts were far away. At the sound of her mother's voice Ursa woke from her reverie, with a start and a bright smile.

"I 'd forgotten the story; I was so busy thinking," she said. "I 'll not write any more now; instead, Mistress Mother," — raising her arms over her head, Ursula caught Mrs. Jeffrey as that lady was going by, and pulling her face down kissed her, — "instead, please your ladyship, I 'm going to sit with you, and help with the weekly mend, and talk. An all-around-up-to-date girl," with a roguish glance at her mother, — sewing was not one of Ursa's strong points, — "should know how to patch and darn as well as to write, should n't she? And now is my chance to take lessons, while Rufie is away; she sews so beautifully that I 'm always ashamed to make my awkward attempts before her. Let 's sit over here by the window."

Mother and daughter settled themselves near the south window, in a cosy corner, which the April sunshine made bright and warm; and when Ursula had hunted for and found "something easy" to mend, the sewing began.

There was a short silence of industry, then, dropping her work in her lap, and lounging forward in the low chair with her hands clasped loosely round one knee, Ursula remarked, "Motheree, let 's talk about the family. You say you read Rufie's letter to Marnie this morning, and I got such a nice long epistle from Judy, which I have very stupidly forgotten in the office; but you shall read it to-morrow. Judy says so many loving and complimentary things about Rufie that I intend to keep the letter and let that young person read it, as a solace when she has torn herself away

from her twin and returned to us. I suppose Ruth told of the arrival of the Austins in Oakland? Mother," Ursa turned a pair of big questioning eyes upon Mrs. Jeffrey, "does n't it look odd that the Austins should go out to Oakland, when Miss Austin herself told us that her brother had been there so often that he was tired of the place and wanted never to see it again?" Ursula threw a cautious glance over her shoulder (which was unnecessary, as this was one of the occasions when Gretchen took an afternoon's airing), and dropping her voice, resumed: "I think," with a sagacious wag of her head, "it was Rufie that took them there, and that Miss Austin would like to have our Ruth for a member of her family, though I should think she and he would both be afraid, after their experience with Marnie. Does n't it seem as if I might be right?"

Mrs. Jeffrey looked half pleased, half troubled. "Perhaps you are right," she said. "In that case, I do hope that Ruth will know her own mind well" —

"You need n't trouble about that, mother," broke in Ursula. "Rufie is n't changeable. If she likes anybody, she likes them to the end; and I have a suspicion that she likes Mr. Austin — I mean a good deal. He is n't at all the man I thought would suit Ruth, but how can one be sure as to what would suit this one or the other? Oh dear! then, if anything should come of that" — She paused, pulling down the corners of her mouth dismally.

"Then I 'd have but one home daughter left," finished Mrs. Jeffrey, smiling, but looking searchingly into the bright frank face uplifted to her. "And if that one daughter *should* marry — say a certain young organist in a Western city, why, then your uncle Gabriel and I would have to live alone and look after each other for the balance of our days."

"Now, mother! mother! you know better than that!" cried Ursula vehemently; dropping her knee, she slipped to the floor and caught her mother's hand and kissed it. "You *know* I 'm never going to marry; I 've told you so again and again, and I mean it! You mean Paul Rose, mother," Ursa's honest eyes did not droop, though a wave of warm red went over her face, and even her ears, "but indeed, you are mistaken. Paul is my friend, my good, firm friend; he is n't one scrap in love with me. He writes to me, and I 'm glad to get his clever, interesting letters, and to know that he is happy and contented in his work. He is doing splendidly, mother; and is *twice* the man that he was when he went away to Cleveland. So you need n't think you 'll get rid of me, mother mine," Ursula nodded gayly. "I 'm going to be your old-maid daughter, — you know there should be one in every family, — and keep company with you and uncle Gabe, and stay on at the Leader, and write stories and novels, and" —

Bending forward, Mrs. Jeffrey took the brave sweet face between her two hands and kissed it warmly. "You dear child!" she said tenderly.

"Now, to go back to Judy's letter," remarked Ursula, a little later, when she had resumed her seat and the "easy" mending, which was not yet half finished. "She said how delighted she was to have Ruth with her — can't you just imagine their endless talks of home, mother? how she wished we 'd all come to California and make her a long, long visit — what a dear good husband Basil was, and how interested he was getting to be in the charitable work that she has undertaken to help with out there. He 's trying to induce some rich men in San Francisco to go in with him in starting a playground out there, to be like the one here at Dedlock Street. That 's Judy's doing — there was a time when Basil never gave a thought to there being poor people in the world! What else was in the letter? Let me see — oh — the very best of all! Judy writes that Basil has promised he 'll bring her on to New York when Ruth returns in June. Then, whether in city or country, we can have a family reunion. Is n't that jolly to look forward to? What did Rufie write to Margaret?"

"Well, you know Ruth is no scribe," observed Mrs. Jeffrey, her fingers flying swiftly in and out of her work as she talked. "Her letter was full of affection for us all, but it was not very long. In the briefest possible manner she described what she called a 'grand' dinner that Judy had given" —

"That Rufie had given *for* Judy, she means," laughed Ursula. "How Judy must have blessed

Rufie for taking all the bother off her hands! Go on, mother."

"Ruth writes that Maria — Basil's mother — is very fond of Judith; and she had given a lunch party in honor of Ruth." Mrs. Jeffrey turned her eyes upon the plants on the window-sill with a slow, absent smile. "I can't imagine the Maria Norton I used to know as enjoying living at a fashionable hotel, and giving up-to-date lunch parties," she said. "Maria was always lively, but devoted to her home, and very plain and simple in her habits. It only shows the change that years can make! Ruth mentioned the arrival of the Austins; that Judy and she were enjoying every moment of their time together; and that Count Ito was flourishing. That was all. I am so glad that Judy will soon come on — I miss the child!" Mrs. Jeffrey sighed.

"Now, mother, don't sigh; except for Judy, your girls are settled right close around you, and just as happy as — as 'sandgrigs,' as Basil used to say, whatever they may be!" Ursula reminded her mother. "There 's Margaret, — where could you find a happier, more contented young matron than she is? Basil's generous wedding present has been of great comfort to her and Jim; they have a cosy home, and Jim is painting better and better pictures; and he considers himself the most fortunate man in the world to have such a good and beautiful wife. Now is n't that so?"

"They are indeed happy," agreed Mrs. Jeffrey; "and I am most thankful for it!"

"And where — *where* in all the world could you find a more beautiful love than exists between Jack and Frances?" went on Ursula, warming with her subject. "A visit with them in their home always sends me away the better and happier for it! Jack Rose is a noble-natured man, mother, and a man that is doing great good in his generation, by the firm tenacity with which he holds to that which is right and honorable. Jack acts his principles in his every-day life; and for all that he 's so shy and quiet, his influence reaches out and out and out in directions that you 'd hardly expect. Why, everybody in the office knows that Jack has had a big share — a bigger share than Driscal would be willing to allow — in making the Leader the clean, 'strong' paper it is to-day. I feel it an honor to have Jack for a brother!" Ursula finished with a little husky note in her voice.

Mrs. Jeffrey patted her daughter's shoulder. "What a warm little champion!" she said playfully, but with approval in her eyes. "Yes, Ursa, Jack is a good man, and I, too, am proud of his relationship to us. I have respect and admiration for him, and a mother's love. And now, what about my daughter Ursula? — how is she faring these days?"

"Well, she is n't faring so *very* badly," answered Ursa, falling into her mother's mood. "The young woman's first book was n't such a brilliant success as her family predicted; but at any rate," with a nod toward the old desk where lay the sheets of manuscript, — "at any rate, it sold well enough

to justify Grove and Erveng in asking its author for another story — which they shall receive in due time. And really, mother," there came a twinkle into the girl's eyes, "remembering how sudden success tried poor Du Maurier, it may be well for me that my first book has not attained a wide popularity. I might n't have stood the test as Jack has with Robert Herrick; success might have turned my head; who knows? Whatever is is best! Now I can write this new story without any disturbing thoughts of a hungry public awaiting it. So we 're all well off. And now that uncle Gabe has at last a parish, our cup of joy is full!"

"Well, you know the matter is n't quite settled yet, though I expect it will be this afternoon," Mrs. Jeffrey said. "Of course, it will be hard to give up our comfortable apartment here; but I 'm so delighted for your uncle to have this parish that I shall do no grumbling over the moving. We could n't let him go and live out there alone."

"Oh, goodness, no!" exclaimed Ursula, laughing; "the dear blessed man would forget to eat or sleep or rest — why, mother, he 'd simply die for want of care! Westerly is n't far from the city, and I believe there are any number of trains a day. There 'd be no trouble about getting in and out of town; and the girls and their husbands could easily go to us. It would seem nice to be in the country again! What kind of a parsonage is he to have at Westerly — nice?"

"Gabriel described everything in the most glowing terms — you know your uncle!" Mrs. Jeffrey

and Ursula laughed. "If there was nothing but a barn in which to hold services, and a shed for his home, Gabriel would be satisfied, and grow enthusiastic over them. But, you know, Francie and Jack went with your uncle to Westerly when he preached there, and from Frances to-day I learned that the rectory is a very good house, small but comfortable; and the church of stone, and very pretty. There are some nice refined families in Westerly, and a large number of poor people, most of whom are employed in the silk-mills there. So there 'll be work for us all. The senior warden, Mr. Manchen, is a friend of your uncle's; he called this morning just after you 'd gone, and from what he said, I judge that now it rests almost entirely with Gabriel to accept the call. The congregation at St. Philip's would like to have him in charge. I think there 's no doubt whatever of his taking the parish; for years it 's been the dearest wish of his heart to have one! Poor fellow! It 'll be a good move for him; that dictionary has kept him very closely confined."

"He does look thin," remarked Ursula. "But whatever will become of the Hebrew and Italian papers without him? — and his protégé, and all his constituents? He 'll be asking them to Westerly in detachments, all the summer long — you 'll see!"

A sudden *whir-r-r-r!* of the electric bell startled the two ladies, and sent Miss Weewee plunging precipitously from the table to the front door, where she sat and waited until it opened and Mr.

Kincaid appeared. After rubbing off some of her superfluous hair on his trousers and getting almost under his feet, pussy led the way with dignity into the dining-room.

The little clergyman was looking thinner than when, more than a year ago, he had officiated at the Jeffrey weddings, and there may have been a few more gray hairs in the fringe of hair that semi-circled the back of his bald head; but he entered the room with his usual light step and a jauntiness of manner that delighted the hearts of the expectant sister and niece.

"He has *actually* got it!" Ursula breathed, in a rapid undertone; and Mrs. Jeffrey exclaimed, "Oh, Gabriel, tell us the good news!"

Mr. Kincaid put his hands in his pockets and jingled his keys merrily. There was a spot of vivid red on each cheek, and in his near-sighted eyes a peculiar brightness.

"Another remittance from Jared!" he announced joyfully. "The third since he went West — the third! I call that pretty good, don't you?" Sitting down at the table, he opened Jared Watkins's letter, and slowly and proudly, with hands that trembled, though only their owner knew that, drew from it two crisp new bank-bills.

"But Westerly is" — began Ursula, then stopped at her mother's touch and her whisper of "Let him tell it in his own way."

"Jared's account of himself is most encouraging, most *en*couraging!" declared the reverend gentleman, drawing the bills nervously through

his fingers. "And what my friend Maynard writes corroborates this letter. Jared is keeping straight and doing well, and his — er — expressions of gratitude for the — er — few kindnesses I showed him are really touching! Poor fellow! he has been brought through deep waters — *deep* waters — up to the throne of Grace. He is keeping straight and doing well — doing well — very well in— "

It suddenly occurred to Mrs. Jeffrey that her brother was agitated, that he was talking against time, and, ignoring her own advice to Ursula, she leaned forward and addressed him. "Well, Gabriel," she said abruptly, almost sternly, "what about Westerly?"

Mr. Kincaid's hands shook so that the crisp bills he held rattled. "Yes; what about Westerly?" he repeated; and some sudden intuition, perhaps foreboding, made the two women cry out together, "Did n't you get the parish?"

Uncle Gabriel hastily pushed Jared's letter and bills aside, and met the questioning eyes. "I could have had the parish — of course," he said unsteadily, "but — but — I gave it away to some one else."

"Uncle *Gabe!*" wailed Ursula; and, "To whom?" briefly asked her mother.

Mr. Kincaid's face was deadly white save for those two vivid spots on his cheek-bones, and his eyes burned through his spectacles as he leaned forward, with his arms extended before him over the table, and answered, making an evident effort

at self-control, — "To the son of — Alexander Ormsby."

Mrs. Jeffrey sprang from her chair, and, going to the table, stood there looking down upon her brother with an almost indescribable expression on her face. She was very much moved. "What!" she cried, in a low, shrill whisper. "You have given up your parish — the only one that has come to you in all these years — given it up, after waiting and longing for it until your heart was almost sick — and to *Alexander Ormsby's* son! The son of the only enemy you ever had in all your life, the man to whom you were so kind, whom you trusted, and who cheated you out of your valuable library, out of your money — who made you so poor that you had barely enough with which to lay your wife and boy in their grave, — the man that tried to blacken your good name! And *you* gave Alexander Ormsby's son your parish! Gabriel! Gabriel! what 're you made of!"

Ursula went swiftly and knelt beside her uncle, laying her head lovingly against his shoulder.

Mr. Kincaid, however, paid no heed to her; he was still leaning on the table, looking up at his sister. "'But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you,'" he quoted slowly, with lips that quivered. "You know Who said that, — they 're not empty words."

He bent his head for a moment, then lifted it and told his story.

"'T was n't easy to do — 't was a hard struggle," he said. "But now I 'm glad I did it; for the first time since — since all that trouble, the sore, hurt feeling against Ormsby has gone out of my heart. It 's gone, thank God! Ormsby's son was on the train with me, and his wife — a very frail-looking woman with a consumptive's cough — and his four children; they looked delicate, too. He was more than shabby, seedy, indeed; why," a flash of uncle Gabriel's radiant smile played over his lips for an instant, "I felt well dressed and — and positively affluent, when I heard his story. He came up and made himself known to me. It seems that Ormsby 's lost all his money, and this young man and his wife 've both been ill; he had to give up his parish on that account, though he is well now; and could n't get another! As we know," — the little gentleman's face was losing its tense lines, and recovering its own sweet brightness, — "as we know, parishes are not always to one's hand. Ormsby's son had neither parish, home, nor money. Somebody 'd offered him two rooms rent free in a cottage at Westerly, and he was taking his family out there — had to borrow the money for the railroad fare. He had n't enough in his pocket to provide his children with more than one day's food. And his boy, his youngest boy, Etta, — had eyes like my little son! D' you suppose I could withhold pity and help from him when I saw that boy's eyes?"

Uncle Gabriel's voice failed; going to his side, Mrs. Jeffrey drew his head upon her shoulder,

and she and Ursula wept with the little clergyman.

Those tears greatly relieved Mr. Kincaid's feelings. In a very few minutes he sat up, and, after blowing his nose with some emphasis, appeared much more cheerful.

"Well, to cut a long story short," he remarked, "before saying anything about it to Ormsby's son, I went and talked the matter over with Manchen and one or two other influential men of the parish that happened to be in the village, to be sure they 'd be willing to accede to my plan. The young man is a good preacher, and has an excellent character, — not like his father. Maynard 's had an eye on this Ormsby for years, and he 's kept me posted; so I knew all about him. After some trouble I succeeded in making the exchange — those people had taken a *great* liking to me!" A faint jingle of the keys was heard. "But I did succeed. In a few days or a week more, Ormsby's son will be in charge, and until then Manchen has promised to look after the whole family and see that they don't want for anything." The little man did not add, as he might have added, that he had insisted on emptying his own slender purse into the hand of the senior warden for the use of "Ormsby's son."

"And that is the end of your long-sought parish!" Mrs. Jeffrey said sadly, but with her arm across her brother's narrow stooping shoulders.

"Well, don't fret; after all, this may be for the best," returned Mr. Kincaid briskly. "I 'd have

hated to leave my two papers, and to turn all those poor Italians adrift. And there 's the dictionary, too ; I owe a duty there."

"But it keeps you so closely confined, Gabriel; and besides, the dictionary won't last for very much longer, and your income is so limited!" Mrs. Jeffrey said.

"I 'm most grieved to lose that pretty rectory, and the church. I had quite made up my mind to live in one and worship in the other," remarked Ursula, who was stroking and patting one of her uncle's hands.

Uncle Gabe's face clouded for a moment, then as rapidly cleared and grew bright, and the hand which lay on the table began drumming a rapid tattoo. "I 'm sorry," he said cheerfully. "But I don't regret what I 've done. Another call may come to me, another parish quite as fine as this. And if it should n't, I 'm not afraid, — the Lord will provide for me. I can trust the future with Him."

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